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What, from whom, from where?

*The macro and micro politics of OECD influence in
Norwegian education policy*

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This thesis aims to give insight into the increasing influence of the OECD in Norwegian educational policy making. It does this using data gathered from the University of Oslo project Policy Learning and Lesson Drawing in Nordic School Reform in an Era of International Comparison (POLNET NRC-283467), as well as my own through e-Innsyn. This Norwegian database consists of documents from and interaction between The Royal Ministry of Education and the OECD.

I have found through quantitative bibliometric analysis that the use of OECD literature in Norwegian policy making is increasing, especially when sorting for in-degree centrality, a measure widely regarded in bibliography as a value of importance or prominence. I have also found evidence of Norwegian attempts at agenda-setting in official OECD meetings and spaces of interaction and policy sharing.

As a result of this analysis, I posit that the Norwegian context provides ample opportunity for policy transfer by exchanging knowledge through networks. I argue that informal and formal interaction networks is a widely understudied aspect of the policy transfer process. I conclude that propinquity enables policy transfer between the OECD and the Norwegian national government due to shared agendas and interests.

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I have found myself trying to write a foreword for about a day now. Turns out that this would be one of the more difficult parts of the thesis. It is strange, when writing this thesis, I actually had a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun because of the people around me who all encouraged me, and to whom I would like to express my deepest gratitude towards.

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To students who may come upon this thesis when writing their own bachelor thesis, or perhaps even master thesis – you are going to be alright. It might suck right now but let me tell you that the peace I feel right now makes it worth it.

And lastly thank you, the reader, please enjoy the read.

Oscar Preben Garberg Minge Oslo, June 2022.

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Abbreviation *Definition*

<i>BRICS</i>	Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa
<i>CERI</i>	Centre for Educational Research and Innovation
<i>CSTP</i>	The Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel
<i>EAG</i>	Education at a Glance
<i>ECEC</i>	Early Childhood and Care
<i>EEA</i>	European Economical Area
<i>GCES</i>	Governing Complex Education Systems
<i>GSF</i>	Global Science Forum
<i>ILSA</i>	International Large-Scale Assessment
<i>INCoDe</i>	Iniciativa Nacional Competenciâs Digitais
<i>INES</i>	Indicators of Educational Systems
<i>IO</i>	International Organisation
<i>ISCED</i>	International Standard Classification of Education
<i>LK06</i>	Kunnskapsløftet/Knowledge Promotion Reform
<i>LSO</i>	Labour Market and Social Outcomes of Learning
<i>MLA</i>	Multi-Level Analysis
<i>NESLI</i>	Network for the Collection and Adjudication of System-Level Descriptive Information on Educational Structures, Policies and Practices
<i>NGO</i>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<i>NOU</i>	Norsk Offentlig Utredning/Official Norwegian Reports
<i>OECD</i>	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<i>OEEC</i>	The Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
<i>PISA</i>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<i>PIAAC</i>	Programme for the Assessment of Adult Competencies
<i>POLNET</i>	Policy Knowledge and Lesson Drawing in Nordic School Reform in an Era of International Comparison
<i>PUMA</i>	Public Management Programme
<i>STI</i>	Science, Technology and Innovation
<i>STIG</i>	Governance of International Science, Technology and Innovation collaboration for Global challenges
<i>TALIS</i>	Teaching and Learning International Survey
<i>TIMSS</i>	Trends in International Mathematics and Science
<i>TNG</i>	Transnational Governance
<i>UK</i>	The United Kingdom
<i>UN</i>	United Nations
<i>UNESCO</i>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<i>USA/US</i>	The United States

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What, from whom, from where?

The macro and micro politics of OECD influence in Norwegian education policy

1 Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected. Economic, political, and cultural cooperation is steadily increasing, creating thick-stranded, interconnected connections between nations and organisations. International organisations are gaining authority in what used to be strictly sovereign domestic matters, such as education. This has not happened by force or binding legal documents but by providing the best possible advice regarding problems. This advice, sometimes learned and transferred, is both facilitated by and a facilitator of *policy transfer*. When a nation is remediating domestic problems, it is only natural to look for the most efficient and practical advice. In this situation, the one perceived with the most relevant information on how to solve the problems becomes a key player in the policy development process. This is one reason why the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) over time has become an authority in providing policy advice to national governments, in part because of its access to and production of valuable statistics and evidence. As political scientist Paul Cairney (2016, p. 3) argued, “Evidence is assertion backed by information”. However, information alone is not enough for a nation-state to immediately consider the OECD’s recommendations and advice; it needs more than that. A sense of similar values, economically and ideologically, may be needed for the OECD’s advice to be valued. Against this backdrop, the term *propinquity*, as described by Legrand (2021), will help in understanding how the proximity of policy transfer processes emerges.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis aims to shed some light upon whether the OECD has risen to become an agenda-setting actor in Norwegian policymaking, and how networks of agents and structures in Norwegian policy production may allow for the organisation to gain traction and facilitate policy transfer. Using bibliometric analysis centred around the use of references in Norwegian green¹ and white papers, my overall aim is to develop insights into how the

¹ Green papers are public inquiry reports. They precede white papers in the policy making process, serving as the knowledgebase for white papers. White papers are political documents produced by governments to legitimize political recommendations that are reviewed and debated in parliamentary processes (Karseth et al., 2022)

OECD is gaining influence on domestic policy production in Norway over time, as well as how the Norwegian governments' participation in international networks may also contribute to Norwegian agenda-setting in policy transfer processes. Participation in networks is documented through reports from the OECD referenced in the Norwegian documents over the time period 1980–2020 and Norwegian delegates' reports. Some of these reports provide insight into what the Norwegian government hopes to gain from these networks, as well as how they are actively participating and communicating in the agenda-setting of the OECD. Against this backdrop, I have formulated the following research questions: To what extent do white and green papers published and referenced by the Ministry of Education between 1988 – 2022 reference the OECD? How do propinquity and knowledge networks give insight into policy transfer in the Norwegian education policy context understood through reception and reaction to OECD policy during recent decades? How do state officials interact as agenda-setters with OECD representatives in international network meetings?

Propinquity, as understood by Legrand (2021), has been used in the field to answer the question of why some received advice is learned and transferred. Baek et al. (2017) argued that transfer does not constitute learning as such, meaning that transfer is contingent on a wide variety of factors that may facilitate learning or impede the transfer process. *Networks* of actors in the policy transfer process will often be used to argue for how knowledge and advice are shared—both beyond and through formal hierarchical structures. The literature in the field often argues that there must be structures in place for the transfer of knowledge across borders. This thesis posits that the dimensions of propinquity and *informal relationships* created by formal networks provide such structures; however, it remains an underdeveloped dimension in research on policy transfer processes. In the thesis, I will forward the argument that structures are created by experts and decision-makers for the express purpose of sharing knowledge.

1.2 Literature

A literature review's prime function is to gain an overview of what we know. It provides insight into key ideas, knowledge, and information on a subject, and for the reader, it should give insight into where the thesis places itself epistemologically in a field of study. Although this thesis is well placed within the field of educational science, theories from political science are used to develop analytical perspectives. Whereas education has historically been oriented towards the adults' responsibilities for raising up children within and outside public schooling, educational sciences has become larger and more differentiated, encompassing

several sub-fields. Some of these subfields, drawing on sociology, philosophy, psychology, and political science, have been the main subjects of study of the master's programme I attend at the University of Oslo. Therefore, this thesis is primarily placed within the field of educational sciences, and it should be read through the gaze of pedagogy, with a primary interest in education and how international influence and the sociology of knowledge shape policy and affect the education sector.

This chapter will start off with a central theme, namely policy transfer that engages both political and educational scholars today (Baek et al., 2018; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Evans, 2017; Evans & Davies, 1999; Legrand, 2021; Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2020). Despite being a relatively new topic of study, policy transfer has raised the interest of many researchers and become a complex, interesting, and diverse research field with multiple philosophical theories underpinning different ways to understand why and how the process facilitates itself and is facilitated under various conditions. This section also seeks to explain what role agents and structures play in the policy transfer process, and what definitions of both agents and structures are central to the research in this context. The thesis moves on to discuss propinquity as a key concept. This is detailed by Legrand (2021), who provided us with rich insight into both why propinquity in policy transfer matters and how propinquity appears contingent, not entirely locked behind cultural likeness or geographical closeness. Furthering this, the thesis sheds light on transgovernmental propinquity, broadening propinquity as a term by including institutional likeness. Then, policy networks, a term not necessarily needing a deep explanation but which plays a major role in the policy transfer process, are addressed. The thesis provides insight into how policy networks develop, and how thick-stranded these networks can be. This section also provides insight into epistemic communities as knowledge networks in which experts share knowledge across national borders within the context of international organisations (Legrand, 2021).

The section on best practice helps us understand how advice makes use of numbers and narratives to govern education by soft power (Grek, 2010). Best practice is easiest understood at face value: the most efficient solutions to remediate a problem. As discussed in further detail below, best practice gives the impression of being a cornerstone in OECD policy recommendation and policy advice, centred around a 'what works' mentality, often grounded in statistical evidence, tailored to the receiving context (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). This leads to the question of what evidence is received, what evidence is effective, and how this evidence

makes its way into domestic policy development, that is, what works, why it works, and who shares it.

The thesis then, using Ydesen's (2019) framework, gives a historic account of how the OECD came to be, starting as the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) and the Sputnik Shock in the late 50s, to the modern authority it has become. Hopefully, this short dive into its history will give the reader a fuller understanding of how and why it is deeply relevant to this thesis, especially by furthering our understanding of the OECD agenda in how education may be used to further economic growth and the philosophical foundation this builds upon.

Next is the Norwegian context. This section, similar to the previous dive into the OECD's history, is designed to give insight into narratives of what Norwegian education was, is, and aspires to be. It specifically clarifies the prominence of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in public opinion on the quality of the education system, and how the Norwegian government attempted to remediate its apparent failing (read: perceived failing) education system by using International large-scale assessments (ILSAs) to create the Knowledge Promotion Reform (LK06) as a response to the "PISA shock" of 2000 (Baek, 2022). It also gives an account of why PISA was perceived in this way, illuminating the use of major resources in its education system but gaining relatively little from it.

The next sections follow standard practice: A chapter on methodology—considerations and choices made to decide the best methods to ultimately address the research questions. In this section, I refer to methodologies that recommend the use of mixed research strategies that cover both macro and micro perspectives. Next, a qualitative content analysis of the data collected through the process of this thesis follows. These data, based on calculations of primarily bibliometric data, are used to form arguments about the prominence of the OECD in Norwegian education policy. Included in the analysis are two reports of OECD network meetings analysed through an ethnographic perspective, giving us insight into how communication and information are being shared with OECD members (Bratberg, 2021; Duedahl & Jacobsen, 2010; Silverman, 2011). This qualitative section is then analysed, and the findings are summarised in the final chapter before a discussion. I would like to add that I have tried contacting the Royal Ministry of Education per email, informing them of my use of public documents. Although my use of these documents was legal, I wanted to ask for the

sake of my own conscience. After receiving an email of approval during the editing process of this thesis, I went ahead with the use of the documents.

Discussion is the cornerstone of any scientific work. In this part of the narrative, the reader gains insight into what the process of writing this thesis has provided in terms of knowledge as well as what the data reveal in terms of interpretations and insights. In short, this thesis has found that the use of OECD references has increased steadily over time, not simply in all documents but in documents that we might consider more important than others. This importance is measured by the degree of centrality: when referencing green and white papers, important documents are those most frequently referenced by *other* green and white papers. I should note that I examine how documents referenced a lot (in degree) by others, to a greater degree, referenced the OECD. I specifically examine four green papers of high in degree measurements: NOU 2014: 7 Elevenes læring i fremtidens skole, NOU 2015: 8 Fremtidens skole, NOU 2018: 2 Framtidige kompetansebehov I, and NOU 2019: 23 Ny Opplæringslov. I also examine three reports from the Royal Ministry of Education from meetings with OECD international networks: INES-NESLI, 2014, Norwegian Delegates Report, INES-NESLI 2013 Report, and OECD-CSTP, 2012, Norwegian Delegates Report. The four green papers are analysed for their thematic contents, and the three reports are analysed ethnographically (see the chapter on methodology to gain insight into what questions are asked when examining such reports). The chapter is divided into two parts, which can be summarised as: Whose evidence matters, and why do I think some evidence is more important than others? Whose and what evidence are divided into three arguments: one of best practice, one of propinquity *or* best practice, and the importance of convenience. After this, I present a previously understudied perspective: informal and formal relationships.

The concluding chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the preceding chapters before concluding arguments, remarks, and a suggestion for future research that adds to the policy transfer literature in education.

2 Theory

2.1 Policy Transfer

Very few nations are isolated politically. Rarely are international policy and domestic governance free from international, transnational, and global trends or influences. The communication of information is key in governance, partly because of a willingness and interest in governing the nation as effectively as possible, as well as the general effect of globalisation. Who had done what before, and how did that work for them? Questions like these, especially when faced with a domestic problem, are oftentimes what triggers the phenomenon of policy transfer as a vehicle for policy development in a country. Similar to the Knowledge Promotion Reform in Norway, global trends and information are powerful effects that sometimes result in a drastic change in how nations govern their people, whether in steering their country politically or in designing their educational systems. The latter is the main area of interest in this thesis.

“Understanding policy transfer is crucial to explanations of contemporary policy-making. The increased willingness of policymakers to mimic the actions of policymakers elsewhere indicates a change in the traditional policy-making paradigm: this has implications for the integrity of the modern political process”. (Legrand, 2021, p. 162)

Policy transfer is the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and ideas in another political system (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). This perspective attempts to shed light on how political systems develop ideas, reforms, and policies and understands that policy officials, among others, are motivated by the prospect of using the benefits of overseas experience to resolve domestic issues (Legrand, 2021). In the context of Norway, those primarily interested in overseas policy, what Legrand (2021) calls officials, should be understood as experts. We will get back to this but bear this in mind.

Policy transfer is, in this sense, the learning and borrowing of public policy as a way of remediating domestic problems, improving effectiveness, or as a tool for governments to present themselves as exemplary globally (Stone et al., 2020). Learning is used in a broad sense. As Baek et al. (2017) argued, borrowing does not necessarily constitute transformative learning; learning in the context of policy transfer is perhaps more closely related to

mimicking, in which policy experts attempt to translate policy to their specific contexts (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020). How these shared policies differ—some being directly copied and others being translated to fit a domestic context—begs the question of whether the borrowed policies share a characteristic of ‘best practice’ (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). ‘Best practice’ can be interpreted in this context as a ‘proven method’, a strategy that has worked to remedy a problem in one political system, which is then assumed to remedy difficulties in another political system or context. This is especially true in educational research, where a key factor for the high performance of education systems, quality assurance systems, and the monitoring of school students and system performance are recommended to identify difficulties and best practices (OECD, 2004). This argument is broadened in a later chapter.

This thesis will also draw on Evans’ (2017) edited definition of policy transfer. Policy transfer is, according to this definition, regarded as a multi-level phenomenon, driven by agents, which occur in and between local, regional, national, transnational, and international arenas. This will give the reader a deeper understanding of how the different actors in the policy transfer process navigate various arenas that are often considered hierarchical in their forms, from grassroots movements to ‘top of the food chain’ actors. The theoretical underpinnings of Evans’ definition of policy transfer stem from a structuration perspective borrowed from Alexander Wendt (1994), who proposed that sub-international systems (or clusters) are instrumental in forging states’ collective identities, producing shared understandings, expectations, and social knowledge.

A structuration perspective on policy transfer implies the existence of both structure and agency as facilitators of the process of policy transfer. Giddens’ (1984) framework can certainly be described as the most influential approach to the structure and agency debate and would argue that structuration works as a reconciliation for the ‘dualism’ between structure and agency (Legrand, 2021, p. 84). In a practical sense, this means that social theorists would explain outcomes by evidencing *either* structures *or* agents and, thus, either structuralism *or* intentionalism. Structuration avoids this since it is focused on both structure *and* agency and on the interaction between them (Legrand, 2019). Structuration as a theoretical underpinning works as the backbone in Evans and Davies’ (1999) multi-level analysis model, which allows a focus on the contribution of both agents and institutions at all stages of policymaking laterally and places their contributions *vertically* in the context of ascending order of policymaking. Legrand (2019) argued, referring to Davies and Evans (2002), that globalisation, internationalisation, and transnationalisation are processes that act as

facilitators of policy transfer. Globalisation, internationalisation, and transnationalisation contribute to the sharing of policy advice by increasing the opportunity structures for policy transfer. Policy transfer is thus regarded as a contributor to the conditions of globalisation, internationalisation, and transnationalisation, as well as a driver of mediation processes and their outcomes. Outcomes are best understood as how the international arena expresses itself in domestic policy, mediation refers to how the outcomes used, and conditions are the domestic setting that uses global, international, and transnational policy advice in its respective contexts. In essence, policy transfer facilitates the very opportunity structures from which it benefits.

2.1.1 Propinquity

Legrand (2021) developed three connected insights for his analytical framework to analyse the multiple *structural* and *agential* dynamics of transfer.

First, he argued that pre-existing alliances and relationships throughout history are relevant to policy transfer. It is claimed that institutional and national likeness induce officials to gravitate privilege lessons emanating from the familiarity of like-minded states (Legrand, 2021). This is propinquity.

Second, this propinquity is conditional in the sense that officials will very easily look elsewhere, contingent on the circumstances. This means that history, alliances, relationships, or likeness weigh only as much as their apparent opportunity for use.

“[...] third, and finally, such learning must necessarily occur through agents, who do so in a way that accords with prevailing professional activities around cross-government engagement networks. Such networks are a technology of governance conditions by the practices of the NPM era facilitated by information technologies of the 1990s and prompted by the identified mutual benefits of the 2000s.” (Legrand, 2021, pp. 79–80)

Legrand’s third argument is what inspired this thesis in the first place. The idea that someone or something somewhere is discussing, learning, and borrowing in places beyond the governmental quarters, in networks without ends, walls, or geographical borders.

2.1.2 Transgovernmental propinquity

Propinquity is not always culturally or geographically contingent, meaning that concepts, such as the social-historical narratives of a shared overlapping identity, are also factors in

play when analysing propinquity (Legrand, 2021, p. 113–114). The Nordic countries’, or the Visegrad group, are prime examples. However, as far as prototypicals go, the Anglosphere is the most common. Here, geography is no longer a realistic trait of why the US, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia have such a close history of cooperation. Rather, institutional similarities, especially the legacy of a ‘Westminster’ style of governing, increase the commensurability of policy (Legrand, 2021). Perhaps this means that institutional factors play an important role in the policy transfer process—especially in the case of propinquity, propagating transfer through similarities. This means that geographical and cultural likeness is not the deciding factor when analysing networks, policy transfer, and propinquity but rather a set of properties such as geography, cultural similarities, and institutional similarities. In the case of transgovernmentality, propinquity properties, such as geography and culture, are non-existent, meaning that transgovernmental propinquity relies on institutional commensurability and perhaps a sense of shared values and agendas.

2.1.3 Agents

The policy transfer process, in the perspective of this thesis, argues for a duality of structure and agency as a necessity for the process to take place. This means that someone, or, as we shall see in some cases, something, plays an active role in the process of transfer. Who are these agents? What is an agent? In her paper ‘Transfer Agents and Global Networks in the ‘Transnationalisation’ of Policy,’ Diane Stone (2004) provided a useful table for understanding agents’ varied natures. She created three categories of agents: ideational, institutional, and networks.

1. Ideationally, agents are business advocates, think tanks, experts, and professional associations.
2. Institutionally, agents are politicians, international civil servants, and state officials.
3. Networks are a little different but work roughly similarly in the context of policy learning. They include multi-actor trisectoral entities, NGOs/civil society, state and international agencies, and businesses.

Agents, then, are anyone or anything able to influence or participate in the policy-learning process. Interestingly, Stone (2004) argued that the OECD ‘also acts as a transfer agent’. She exemplified this by referring to the information disseminated by the OECD’s Public Management Programme (or PUMA, for short). She argues that it builds on a number of mechanisms—publications, networks of senior officials, conferences, etc.—to spread

information and provide ‘forward thinking’ on matters such as national accounting standards, human resources management, and OECD Best Practices for Budget Transparency (Stone, 2004). The author also pointed out how the OECD spreads and develops economic norms, similar to how Ydesen (2019) argued that the OECD has been able to set a normative precedent in the hows, whats, and whys of policy. Understanding the OECD as an agent for policy learning and transfer thus increases the scope of how we understand the agents of policy transfer. Additionally, the use of ‘networks of senior officials’ in Stone’s (2009) definitions helps us to understand that officials do not necessarily only encompass state power but also a transgovernmental one. Similar to Legrand’s (2021) allusions when discussing Evans and Davies’ (1999) method, Stone (2009) inadvertently deconstructed the verticality of policy transfer. Policy transfer agents, therefore, do not always operate vertically but also horizontally, with non-governmental organisations. This moves us in the direction of understanding how these network structures not only facilitate but also persist across time.

2.1.4 Structures

The United Nations (UN), the OECD, UNESCO, governments, private enterprises, or private persons represent agents², but these alone, according to Legrand (2021), are only part of the equation. Both structure and agency are needed in a larger understanding of not only how policy transfer happens in the first place but also the structures facilitating the phenomenon, what Legrand (2021) described as those who learn (agents) and the environment in which they learn (structure).

In structuration theory, structure and agents are conceptualised as mutually constitutive while remaining ontologically distinct entities. The operationalisation of structuration is more complicated. Evans and Davies’ method links the literature they identify as integral to policy transfer, globalisation, internationalisation, and transnationalisation with policy transfer (Evans & Davies, 1999). Structures matter greatly, the argument being that structures create opportunities for transfer. First, they claim that processes of globalisation, internationalisation, and transnationalisation facilitate policy transfer. This happens by increasing the opportunity structures for policy transfer. Second, policy transfer can then, as mentioned earlier, be regarded as a contributor to the conditions of globalisation, such as how the EU operates in that aid is rarely given without creating the structures for nations to help

² The Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

themselves first. Third, Evans and Davies suggested that it is necessary to measure the impact of these processes on the behaviour of the state (Legrand, 2021).

2.2 Governance

Evans and Davies generated a key question: ‘In what sense do these external structures facilitate state behaviour with particular regard to processes of policy transfer and how?’ (Legrand, 2019). The ‘competition state’ becomes an important idea in this regard. Philip Cerny (1997) argued that this evolution towards a competitive state is evidenced in the recalibration of domestic and foreign policies to meet the demands of global economic imperatives and thus remain competitive (Cerny, 1997). If the state is imagined as the mind, state policy shapes the behaviours and thoughts of the nation. As argued by Evans and Davies (1999, p. 373):

“In order to complete such an ambitious project, new forms of statecraft have emerged, and institutional structures and political practices have been reshaped with the aim of enhancing the steering capacity of the state”.

It is important to understand that steering capacity may be understood differently based on how one positions oneself in the discourse. Maroy (2009) argued, for example, “that regulation is partially converging around ‘post-bureaucratic’ governance models and regulation mechanisms” (Maroy, 2009, p. 71). Governance models, according to Maroy (2009), are understood as theoretical and normative models serving as cognitive and normative references, especially for decision-makers, in defining ‘good ways to steer or govern’ the education system (Maroy, 2009, p. 76). Renowned scholars in the field of education and political science have questioned whether public policy has transformed into a post-bureaucratic mode of governance (Maroy, 2009; Verger, 2022), surviving within a network-based society by organising hierarchically and governing by formal and substantial rationales in a Weberian way (Karseth et al., 2022, p. 9). Understanding this makes it easier to understand how and why statecraft not only exists but also how it evolves over time. To enhance the steering capacity of the state is thus understood as both a means to an end and the end in and of itself—we wish for the state to be able to make rapid changes to account for the difficulties the country might face, promoting *effective* styles of governance. In this thesis, effectiveness is understood as a property reserved for governments being able to make changes quickly, unencumbered by bureaucratic, time-consuming processes.

An example of rapid change in the state can be seen in the developments in education and reform in countries such as Norway after PISA in the early 2000s. The PISA results were presented for OECD member countries, giving insights into how they were doing in comparison internationally. Countries such as Norway, which, before this, considered their educational systems strong in an international sense, would come to find themselves only average or even below average compared to their “peers”. In Norway, what is domestically known as “the PISA shock” prompted a sweeping educational reform known as Kunnskapsløftet (LK06). LK06 proved to be a massive overhaul of the Norwegian educational system aiming to improve international competitiveness in subjects such as math and science (Camphuijsen et al., 2021; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2013). Camphuijsen et al. (2020) argued that this prompted a move towards test-based accountability (TBA), a global model for education reform.

Although it can be argued that these reforms, especially in the Norwegian context, have not been as effective as intended (Ropeid, 2019), there exists a question of whether these reforms have developed closer cooperation between international organisations such as the OECD, UNESCO, and the sovereign state. The remnants of this cooperation can be found in the increasing use of references in domestic green papers and the following state-issued white papers (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020). The Norwegian government, which thought itself ahead of the curve in terms of educational outcomes, found itself average and in some subjects even below average. This “shock” would prompt the Norwegian government to create commissions specifically selected to research ways to remediate the perceived poor results from the PISA tests.

In Norway, a standard model of a professional bureaucratic mode of governance was institutionalised during the 20th century. This means that prior to issuing a reform, the government appoints commissions with a mandate to review past and current experiences and make recommendations for further action (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020). The knowledge produced by these commissions—green papers—serves as the expert knowledge used by government officials when producing new policy—white papers as it were. It is briefly mentioned that the OECD and UNESCO, international organisations, are referenced more often than before in these green papers, which is especially evident in the green paper ‘I første rekke’ (In the First Row) (NOU, 2003). This indicates that somewhere along the way, international organisations such as the OECD or UNESCO may have been able to influence the process of developing white papers, and thus policy. The OECD is especially interesting

in this sense, having positioned itself as a normative conductor in educational policy development (Ydesen, 2019). This will be further discussed in the coming chapters and the analysis, but suffice to say that OECD provides data that commissions find invaluable when producing recommendations to the government, often grounded in statistical evidence. ‘Education at a glance’, produced by the OECD, is especially useful, providing data on the structure, finances, and performance of the education system across the OECD countries and partner economies (OECD, 2021). The use of OECD literature in green and white papers is not the only focus of this thesis. The networks of actors at play in transnational governmental networks will also be an object of analysis. Therefore, I will analyse how policy networks operate as mediating contingency for the flow of knowledge across borders.

2.3 Transgovernmental Policy Networks

Much of the interest in this thesis revolves around policy networks, the agents comprising these networks, these networks as actors themselves, and the hows and whys of how these networks are maintained. Let me turn to Legrand (2021) as I attempt to find some key qualities that these networks share, but I will start by defining a policy network in the first place. Stone (2004, pp. 9–10) defined policy networks as ‘multi-actor entities that oscillate around a common or shared policy problem’. According to her, “These networks are comprised of various actors from civil society, government, government agency, industry, industry groups and the professions” (Stone, 2004, pp. 9–10).

Using this definition, we find that networks are comprised of multiple actors from different areas and sectors, whether government or industry, and that these compositions of actors are contingent and temporal. This, in turn, means that these networks oscillate in and out of ‘reality’. Reality is, in this sense, understood as a dimension that exists at a time and place, similar to how Evans and Davies described the contingent nature of these networks as a result of governments’ choice to interact with these networks.

1. ‘The need to satisfy objective policy problems;
2. Gaining access to other organisational networks;
3. Further relevant motivating values (regime pull, discourse pull, ideological factors);
and
4. Providing certain essential skills and knowledge resources’ (Evans & Davies, 1999, p. 376).

Transgovernmental networks are understood by Slaughter and Zaring (2006, p. 215) as “informal institutions linking actors across national boundaries and carrying on various aspects of global governance in new and informal ways.” Slaughter (2004) argued that the objective of these networks is to engage with ‘the governance problems that arise when national actors and issues spill beyond their borders’. Following Raustiala (2002), Legrand added to this, arguing that the networks are not *ad hoc* linkages but are instead formed purposively, established as “loose-structures, peer-to-peer ties developed through frequent interaction” (Raustiala, 2002, p 5).

From these perspectives, I have developed the following definition of transgovernmental policy networks:

Transgovernmental policy networks are informal institutions that engage with governance issues that arise when domestic problems spill outside of their borders, forming loosely structured, peer-to-peer ties developed through frequent interaction.

It is this definition that I draw on in this thesis.

2.3.1 Epistemic communities as policy networks

Epistemic communities, as presented by Haas (1992, p. 3), are a “network of professionals with recognised expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue area”. These epistemic communities comprise a sizeable portion of Evans and Davies’ (1999) epistemic communities approach, being a major source for the evaluation of knowledge elites as agents of policy transfer. The authors put forward the argument that these communities are agents pushing for new or changed international practices and institutions, not only nationally but also transnationally and internationally (Evans & Davies, 1999). These agents also share a set of common characteristics. Haas (1992, p. 3) divided these into four major categories:

1. They have shared norms and principles which give them a common cause for the ‘social action of community members’
2. They have a shared understanding of the causes and effects of common problems in their fields of expertise and are able to jointly articulate (policy) correctives to these problems.
3. They share the same benchmarks of evidence-based practice: ‘shared notions of validity’.

4. They have ‘a common policy enterprise’; within their area of expertise, they have a common understanding of the problems they face and a shared conviction towards resolving those problems for the enhancement of ‘human welfare’.

While this thesis will not necessarily use epistemic communities as an analytical unit, it is nevertheless an important part of MLA, and necessary to keep in mind as we move forward.

2.4 Best Practice

Best practice solutions appear to be a major part of the policy transfer process. What best practice is as a standalone term was mentioned shortly earlier; however, it is important to understand what best practices mean in the context of the policy transfer process. Best practices often appear in recommendations from different actors that provide support and policy advice to receiving recipients. Best practice is easily understood at its face value; it is quite literally the ‘best practice solution’ from different actors—whether national, international, or transnational—effectively being ‘what works’ in any field. In the case of policy, best practice is a subject-specific solution to a difficulty or problem (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of best practice, where different nations adopted ‘what works’ from other countries and implemented similar or exact copies of international policy. The mask mandates or the 1-metre social distancing rules implemented worldwide are one of such policies, (Legrand, 2021).

In the context of educational policy, best practice is easiest understood as legitimising evidence in green paper recommendations and white paper arguments; as evidence, it may refer to a nation’s high-percentile PISA results and argue that similar policies may be used in the receiving nation as well. In a white paper, evidence may be used in a similar way but with the added effect of being inscribed into enacted policy. The Hong Kong–England case is a prime example where the Hong Kong education system emulated the West before being used as evidence of effective education policy producer in white papers in the English context (Forestier & Crossley, 2015).

The OECD works in very similar ways, functioning as a broker of policy advice rather than as a generator of educational policy. A broker is understood here as someone who conveys knowledge. The OECD has the luxury of being the largest proprietor of data on educational matters, having a large array of international large-scale assessments as part of their production, and the ability to learn from every OECD member country policy. The Norwegian context, for example, often cites OECD literature in both green papers and white

papers in similar ways to the English–Chinese example, but it refers to global progress reports more often than, for example, ILSA data.³ There may be many reasons why one type of evidence is favoured over another, as the analysis of the quantitative data will provide evidence, but for now, it may be argued that the ILSA data is harder to use than Global Progress Reports. Ease of use for both experts and decision makers appears to be a key feature.

Best practice may be received from public information and data such as Education at a Glance (OECD), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, UNESCO), or more formally from specialised networks such as the Global Science Forum (GSF) or Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) meetings. Networks are, therefore, also a proprietor and broker of best practice solutions shared between members of the networks. These networks, as mentioned earlier, share policy advice from their own domestic contexts. What worked in, for example, the Polish context, given the drastically improved PISA results of 2000–2006? This thesis has gathered documents of reports from meetings in which the Polish delegates share information on the hows, whys, and whats of their policy development process, what advice they were given, and why the advice was implemented. This helps give insight into how networks share knowledge, providing a platform for discussion of how networks operate and function.

We started this chapter by discussing policy transfer networks, how they work, how they are facilitated by both themselves and aiding structures, and the methods for analysing them, before describing the OECD and then the Norwegian context. During this chapter, I have also touched upon important subjects for understanding dimensions of policy transfer, such as propinquity, structuration, and the contingencies of cooperation and transfer and learning processes. Our visitation to the OECD gave us information on why the OECD holds its position of agenda-setting power – and how it got there. At the end of the chapter, I also presented how the Norwegian government works tightly with the OECD when developing new policy, using the organisation as the main forum to learn by borrowing policy recommendations. This close cooperation, this thick-stranded *network* of agents, both official and unofficial, governmental, and nongovernmental, creates the policy transfer network that this thesis aims to discuss. Hopefully, this chapter has laid the conceptual and theoretical

³ ILSAs are Large-scale international assessments. PISA-tests from the OECD or TIMSS from UNESCO are examples of this. Chapter 4 gives insight into how ILSAs are becoming less relevant.

foundation for understanding how these networks develop, facilitate their own persistence, and create the opportunity for policy transfer.

2.5 The Historical and Current Context of the Research

This thesis is written in a specific context that has been shaped by history. This means that history has had an influence on what our current context contains, and what it may look like in the future. For both the OECD and the Norwegian government, the historic context matters greatly for our understanding of the current landscape, enabling us to explore how the OECD and the Norwegian educational system came to be coupled as they are today. The chapter starts with the OEEC's shift from the administrative base for the Marshall Plan into the Sputnik Shock of the 1950s, becoming the OECD in the 1960s, and then provides some insight into the economic agenda of the OECD (Ydesen, 2019). Following this, the Norwegian context is described in greater detail, giving some insight into what the Norwegian state was, and what it has become, changed in part of economic growth following the oil boom of the seventies. This chapter serves to give insight into the context of my research focus; this will provide us with a deeper understanding of how and why the OECD and Norway closely cooperate.

2.5.1 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

The OECD has gained a sizeable portion of this thesis. Formerly known as the OEEC, or the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, the OECD was established briefly after the Second World War to coordinate the European Recovery Plan under the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan was a US aid project designed to remediate the direct effects the war had on Europe, especially with rebuilding the continent after being ravaged by war since 1939.

With headquarters in Paris, the OECD has now become one of the most influential publishers of mostly economic data through annual publications of evaluations and rankings of its member countries (OECD, 2021). This shift from the OEEC to the OECD, taking the leading role of other international organisations in setting new agendas for education globally (Ydesen, 2019), culminated with the launch of PISA in 2000. PISA might be the single most influential study in education in the last couple of centuries, serving as a wake-up call for complacent nations. As noted earlier in the thesis, Norway's sweeping educational reform LK06 is considered to be the direct result of what Norwegian educational discourse calls the "PISA shock" (Camphuijsen et al., 2021). Whether intended to be this influential or only happenstance, the OECD launched itself to the forefront of educational discourse, and has

now become the proprietor of massive amounts of data on the educational achievements of its member countries. This achievement should not be taken lightly, since the OECD now, as Ydesen (2019) stated, holds a dominant role as an agenda-setting agent in educational policy. The whats, hows, and ifs of education now have a foot not only in the sovereign but also in the transnational domain.

Although PISA studies have exerted a strong influence on certain parts of educational policy, such as evaluation, autonomy, and accountability (Wöbmann et al., 2007), some studies have also been employed by political opposition as a point of attack on educational policies (Froese-Germain, 2010). The OECD also provides support to its member countries. Evident in its country reviews, the OECD will, upon order, analyse its member countries' economic efficiency, educational achievements, and more, before suggesting recommendations for policy oftentimes grounded in empirical statistical data gathered from similar countries. Propinquity was discussed earlier in this thesis, but empirical statistical data have not been discussed. More commonly known as 'best practice' solutions, these data will be discussed in proper detail later, but for now, it is sufficient to know that although the OECD can recommend policy, it is often grounded in a best practice approach gathered from the forefront of social science research. Mundy (1998) argued that the OECD has become "the central forum for educational policy co-ordination among advanced capitalist countries" and "the main multilateral provider of cross-national educational statistics and research in the North" (Mundy, 1998, p. 488).

OECD support is oftentimes designed as policy reviews in a large array of fields, ranging from tax reform to agricultural reform works, such as a large-scale consultation. The review starts in the country being reviewed: the country in question will perform a background report, proceeding into a two-week mission by an external team of reviewers before the preparation and completion of the review report by the external team. Following this is a one-and-a-half-day review session by an OECD Committee, in which the minister (and their senior staff) for the specific branch comments on recommendations and conclusions from the review team. The result is a published final review (*Reviews of National Policies for Education – OECD*, OECD, 2022). From the data and information this thesis has gathered, these consultations start informally as conversations. Through e-mails and in-person conversations, an OECD representative lays out the groundwork for the review and, from what it seems, will have been provided with a set of focus areas from which their analysts will work—these being the groundwork from the countries' own review. Naturally, all of this

will vary based on the scale of the project, sometimes being as short as a few days to as long as many months of cooperation and work.

This thesis places interest on the educational branch of OECD policy recommendations. This ties into how the OECD managed to position itself as a leading figure in educational research—a field of governance that has historically been a key part of nation building. As discussed earlier, the OECD launched itself at the forefront as an educational agenda setter because of the PISA programme. However, education became a part of the OECD agenda only after the birth of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), created in 1968 as a branch of the Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel (CSTP). The birth of CERI is also the birth of the OECD's education policy area (Ydesen, 2019). Whereas the OEEC has strong legal instruments, the OECD does not. As Centeno (2019) argued, the OECD was never really meant to issue binding directions; instead, the OECD had a direction-setting nature, which it still has. The organisation works through agenda-setting and surveillance mechanisms: it generates peer pressure by coordinating events and meetings; it forms opinions by conducting and publishing studies and reports; and it exerts soft regulation by coordinating projects and programmes (Centeno in Ydesen, 2019; Weymann & Martens, 2005; Mahon & McBride, 2008; Krejsler, 2019).

The establishment of an education policy area within the OECD was never guaranteed, the organisation being historically mainly interested in economic governance. However, it was not until the birth of the CERI that the organisation formalised its educational policy agenda. As Mundy (1998) argued, the birth of the OECD's education policy area partially breaks from the common view of the OECD as an organisation that was initially envisaged as an instrument for maintaining socioeconomic structures. What CERI truly allowed was the OECD's ability to investigate issues of education policy from which the OECD's educational policy area emerged. The OECD has become a legitimate actor endowed with an authorised agency in education governance (Centeno in Ydesen, 2019). It is important to note that these changes (e.g., the endowment of agency, the formalised power to influence policy and recommendations) were not a product of CERI on its own, but broader developments in the organisation's broader changes, such as New World Order, growing demands for technical expertise and the coming together of plural interests around education (Centeno, 2019). Changes in the OECD's internal policy had to be in place, such as the instrument themselves, the instrument settings, and the goals of the policy (Centeno, 2019, pp. 77–78).

2.5.1.1 Educational policy for economic growth

Dear Minister,

For a long time, the OECD has been studying the economic and social benefits which individuals draw from better education. For the first time, we are now able to extend the picture to the impact which improved learning outcomes, as measured by PISA, have on the long-term economic performance of nations.

I want to share this report, that we prepared in collaboration with Stanford University, with you because the results illustrate the importance of educational improvement with impressive numbers. The generation of children born this year in OECD countries could gain an additional US\$ 260 trillion in economic output over their lifetime, if school systems in OECD countries raise their performance to the level that the best performing education systems have demonstrated in PISA. This is six times the current size of the combined OECD economies. Even a modest goal of raising school performance by 25 PISA points over the next 20 years – which is less than what the most rapidly improving education system in the OECD, Poland, achieved between 2000 and 2006 alone – would lead to future increases in the OECD's GDP of more than \$ 115 trillion.

There is uncertainty in these projections as there is in all projections but it is clear that the gains from improvement in learning outcomes far outstrip the value of the short-run business-cycle management. This underscores the importance of education as a critical investment for the future, for individuals, economies and society at large.

Document: PL Transmission of rapport “The High Cost of Low Educational Performance” Inquiry to the Minister of Education.

We should keep in mind that although the OECD is now interested in education, the OECD is still an organisation interested in economic growth and development – the different branches of the organisation are simply extensions of this economic ideal. Similar to

Krejsler’s (2019) argument, the OECD gradually became more interested in school and education from the late sixties, early eighties, and onward, both in national and transnational policy discourse. Education is progressively related to national and regional economic growth. Future economic growth is becoming more and more contingent upon the ‘knowledge economy’. Brazilian philosopher Roberto Unger (2019, p. 20) described the knowledge economy as “the accumulation of capital, technology, technology-relevant capabilities, and science in the conduct of productive activity”. This short and to-the-point definition well describes the view of education in this thesis: an activity that has become not for the prosperity of people, but as an economic incentive for countries to accumulate what might be the most advanced form of production.

The knowledge economy is not simply the production of goods and services; one might consider older definitions of production. Instead, as Unger (2019, p. 72) writes, “it is important not to mistake the knowledge economy as simply a high-technology industry”, in lieu of Silicon Valley start-up businesses. Rather, the knowledge economy must be imagined as being widely disseminated and deepened or radicalised through such dissemination. Its true character lies in its potential to develop across a wide range of economic activities, with education being one of them. Classical development in economics, similar to what Krejsler (2019) argued, is that education is one of the fundamentals of economic growth. Ensuring that the modern worker has the skills and technological literacy to operate or even improve upon the modern automated industry is what the knowledge economy argues is necessary. Unger (2019, p. 40) argued that “the knowledge economy makes possible – and to develop

more deeply and widely it requires – a fundamental change in the relation of worker to machine”.

What is argued, either implicitly or explicitly, is that for the continued prosperity of the nation, the knowledge economy requires a fundamental change in the relation of worker to machine. “Educational policy discourse has become linked to the performance of the national economy by means of a knowledge economy discourse” (Krejsler, 2019, p. 253). This change can be observed directly in OECD’s (1996) *Knowledge-Based Economy*, where the organisation clarifies its stance regarding its educational agenda. As early as the foreword of the document, the document states that ‘The OECD economies are increasingly based on knowledge and information’ and that ‘OECD analysis is increasingly directed to understanding the dynamics of the knowledge-based economy and its relationship to traditional economics, as reflected in “*new growth theory*” (OECD, 1996). The sentiment of the workers’ technological literacy is echoed here, pointing to the need for workers to acquire skills and continuously adapt these skills, claiming that they underlie what they refer to as the “*learning economy*” (OECD, 1996). Repeating the same argument again in *Competencies for the Knowledge Economy* (OECD, 2001), the organisation points to how “pressures to increase the role of information and knowledge in national economies have provoked a wide-ranging debate about what kinds of competencies young people and adults now need”.

In the OECD publication *Learning Compass 2030*, the organisation distinguishes between three types of skills: cognitive and meta-cognitive, social and emotional skills, and practical and physical skills (OECD, 2019).

Cognitive skills are about what one would imagine, focusing on language, numbers, reasoning, and acquired knowledge. Metacognitive skills, however, include ‘learning-to-learn’ skills. Social and emotional skills include thoughts, feelings, and behaviours used to develop oneself and for cultivating relationships. OECD’s section on ‘physical skills’ shows what some may call a holistic approach to what is hegemonically considered physical skills, encapsulating both the ability to use information and communication technology devices and new machines and the ability to play musical instruments, creating artwork and play sports and even life skills, such as how to dress oneself, how to cook, and cleanliness (OECD, 2019).

All these skills can be interpreted as basic, human abilities needed to function in modern societies, but what the publication shows is a focus on the future for these skills: cognitive

skills for the ability to find success in education, physical skills for creativity and ability to work, and social and emotional skills to be able to foster relationships in the workplace, in education, and in the community, as well as in exercising civic responsibilities (OECD, 2019, pp. 86–93). The OECD also identifies the necessary attitudes and values for 2030. In this context, values are defined as the guiding principles that underpin what people believe to be important when making decisions in all areas of private and public life (OECD, 2019). Attitudes, by contrast, are built out of four different value categories that are globally informed but locally contextualised, including the following:

- Personal values – How one wishes to define and lead a meaningful life.
- Social values – How one behaves towards others; how does one manage interactions. They also reflect cultural assumptions about well-being.
- Societal values – What one’s priorities of cultures and societies are. These values endure when they are enshrined in social and institutional structures, documents, and democratic practice.
- Human values – These are very similar to societal values, although they transcend nations and cultures. Applying to the well-being of humanity. (OECD, 2019, p. 102)

Pointing to examples from member countries, the OECD points to the Estonian “Values Development in Estonian Society 2009–2013”, and the revised Norwegian Core Curriculum. Aiming to renew the curriculum, three more principles are designed to encompass learning, development, and “danning” (directly translated to education, but perhaps more similar to “bildung”): public health, democracy, and citizenship, and sustainable development (Udir, 2021).

2.5.2 The Norwegian education policy context

Drawing from a chapter on the OECD and its formalised agendas, it might be appropriate to view Norway through the lens of the OECD before delving into the history of the Norwegian educational system. The OECD divides its “snapshots” into three categories: students, institutions, and system. These categories attempt to briefly describe how the Norwegian education system works for students, including PISA scores, and how socio-economic factors affect student performance, early childhood care, employability, and rate of unemployment. Here, they use their own programmes of evaluation, such as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), PISA, and Survey of Adult Skills. The OECD identifies that Norway faces a challenge in ensuring that students remain in school until the end of upper secondary

education. As for goals, the continued promotion of equity is of “high interest” (OECD, 2015, p. 29).

Their evaluation of institutions gives a comprehensive summary of how the Norwegian education system works, again giving an account of how this system performs relative to other OECD member countries. The improvement of learning conditions for students is identified as a running challenge as well as a goal to be attained.

Their chapter on systems is also evaluated compared to OECD member country averages. Focusing especially on the decentralised school system and generous expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP is one of the highest among OECD countries. Policy and reform implementation across all municipalities remains a challenge, partly due to school autonomy. Optimising resources in the context of a decentralised school system is key. The OECD also identifies a need for Norway to improve the “coherence and responsiveness of its school system, focus on developing relevant skills to achieve its economic and social goals, and on activating and using these skills effectively” (OECD, 2021).

The Norwegian education system is interesting, being one of the most generously funded systems among the OECD countries, but still scoring only slightly above, or sometimes even below PISA averages (OECD, 2018). Having believed itself to be a strong system and having the blaring realisation that despite its generous expenditure, its students performed only slightly above average. This perceived discrepancy prompted the PISA shock and its subsequent reforms. Norway, as a case or object of study, is interesting in a political sense because the government explicitly commits to evidence-based policy development. It generously funds sector research (known as the ‘institute sector’) and has institutionalised scientific policy advice in the form of NOUs (green papers) (Baek et al., 2018). In Norway, prior to issuing reforms, a commission with a mandate to review past and current experiences makes recommendations for further action. The government takes political action based on these NOUs (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020). There are two parts to this process: the commissions prepare green papers (a report from the commission that includes recommendations for further political action), which is then used in white papers (issued by the sovereign). These governance tools are typical features of a standard model of bureaucracy, and Norway has this model institutionalised. It is important to add that these government-appointed commissions are not only composed of government officials and

stakeholders; they also include academics and experts. This ‘expertisation’ of ad hoc commissions in Norway has even become its own area of study (Christensen & Hesstvedt, 2019), paradoxically using experts to review experts. Importantly, expert is a broad term here. Researchers are only experts if they are involved in regulatory science. Seeing that Norway has institutionalised the use of expert advice and evidence (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2020), it should come as no surprise that Norway has a long history within the OECD, having been a diligent member since 14. December 1960 (OECD, 2021).

The Norwegian government and the OECD have a long history of cooperation, especially in the development of new reforms and policies. From OECD ‘education at a glance’ papers to tailor-made reviews of the education system, the cooperation and support between the Norwegian government and the OECD is long and thick-stranded. A relationship like this fosters a network with a sense of propinquity, which in turn drives cross-border policy engagement (Legrand, 2021). The use of cross-borders here is problematic, as the OECD is not a country, nor does it have borders, but it does serve as an arena for sharing, learning, and borrowing policy. Propinquity is therefore conditional; officials (be it government officials, or expert commissions) who often look to neighbouring, culturally similar countries look elsewhere when gathering necessary information to develop new policy or preparing recommendations for reform. However, as the data this thesis has gathered will show, the Norwegian government looks to the OECD for guidance and support during the policy development process.

Also interesting is that in the process of gaining access to internal documents produced by the Royal Ministry of Education or the OECD, or reports from meetings between both, one may sometimes not be allowed access. Norway attempts to operate fully transparently in bureaucratic matters, political matters, or governmental matters, but the OECD does not have to follow this policy of transparency. There are some exemptions from the law: The ministry may not grant access if the document contains information such as negotiation strategies; people’s rights (privacy) does not allow it; or the documents contain private information (Offentleglova – offl, 2009, § 20, A-b-c). What is especially interesting about this law is that it is designed around Norwegian foreign policy. Whereas it is uninteresting as far as education is concerned, it is of some interest in the field of educational policy. The problem raises the question as to what the stakes are, and what is being negotiated. Some reports from 2012 and forward show evidence of clear, concise agendas being set even before meetings. This is especially evident in CSTP meetings, where the Norwegian delegates will sometimes

question ‘what we get out of it’, showing that policy transfer is not as simple as just picking and choosing – but a product of long negotiations, discussions, and reporting. The policy transfer process is thus a concerted effort of different actors to shape transnational cooperation that works for all actors engaged in the process.

In one way, we might find ourselves at first under the impression that propinquity might be a static feature of two nations, only applied to language, history, or political ideology and agendas in the transnational and national. However, in this context, this might mean that propinquity is also a work of cooperation in agenda-setting or in what is being made, working together with different actors in tandem to shape agendas closer to the interest of one government.

3.0 Methodological Considerations

At its core, any science, study or thesis is built on set rules of engagement that help steer research in a certain direction, ensuring its validity and reliability. Therefore, methodological considerations often take up a relatively large part of the work before any actual research has been done. This chapter explains such considerations and ultimately what the thesis decided upon choosing is salient, as it enables other researchers to review its validity or relevance in its field.

3.1 Mixed Methods

This thesis relies on mixed methods: It uses a mixture of methods to reach a conclusion regarding a research question (Froehlich et al., 2020, pp. 130–131). Froehlich et al. (2020) argue that mixing methods, qualitatively and quantitatively, may provide benefits without much added cost. In their example, mixed-methods social network analysis, social networks comprise most of the theoretical and analytical underpinnings, but the argument is also relevant in this thesis. Mixing qualitative methods, which may provide a broader, bird’s-eye view of a research field with qualitative methods, provides a deeper understanding of a research question by extending the ways we gather evidence (Froehlich et al., 2020). This thesis generates empirical data through quantitative bibliometric analysis. In its simplest form, bibliometrics is the scientific study of publications, meaning that its contents are not analysed epistemologically, but quantitatively. Bibliometrics may be statistically technical or rendered readable and understandable for nonmathematicians (Ball, 2018). ‘How many’ is

the leading question while the numbers and calculations are used to make sense of phenomena or explain observed patterns of interest.

Qualitatively, this thesis uses documents of interactions between two actors, namely the Royal Ministry of Education and the OECD. These documents of interaction, be they in the form of reports or reviews, commonly contain the theme of discussion. These themes and communication will be analysed and used to illuminate agendas and agenda setting in policy transfer network meetings. These documents are nearly directly copied from their original forms. A couple of them, however, are translated from Norwegian to English. In addition, since these documents contain mostly direct quotes, they are differentiated using text boxes. Anything within a text box is a quote or directly excerpted from a text. Anything outside is either an analysis or a comment on the boxes. The point is to ascertain whether these networks share direct policy advice or if the communication carries over from meetings of networks to green papers.

Ethnography may help pose relevant questions. Silverman (2011, p. 238) gives insight into how one may use ethnography to attempt a depiction of reality when reading texts. In referring to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, pp. 142–143), he presents questions that help an ethnographer to approach texts ‘for what they are’. There are 12 questions, of which I will focus on five: How are these texts written? Who writes them? What is their purpose? What is the occasion, and what is recorded? From the list, I have omitted several questions which I argue are both unnecessary to the analysis and which on their own appear as an outright contradiction to the analysis’ purpose – questions like What is taken for granted? or What do readers need to know to make sense of them? The reasoning here is simple: This qualitative section is, in many ways, merely a conceptual test. I believe that using reports for the express purpose of gaining insight into agendas and processes in formalised networks may be an interesting method to widen our knowledge of policymaking. Therefore, the reader should keep Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1995) questions in mind when reading this section: How are these texts written? Who wrote them? What is their purpose? What is the occasion, and what is recorded? What is interesting about method, however, is that scientific procedures may be employed to create a question to be asked in the sense that the method may illuminate problems the writer may not have had the facilities to ask without the use of this method. In a sense, this means that the method becomes a means of exploration on its own.

On the question of reliability, replicability and validity, the qualitative section may be victim to two relatively common challenges. For one, the reports seldom follow a common recipe. Consequently, it will not always be as easy as I have previously experienced in the examples I present. Second, these reports contain a specific theme during a specific time and place. This time and place regulate ‘what is important’ in its specific context – this gives way to the problem of replicability. The method with which I have analysed these documents is the product of their contexts and are thus analysed according to their contexts. However, an important consideration is the analysis’ reliability. My personal, subjective attitudes may very well shape the analysis (Bratberg, 2021). Naturally, ethnography attempts to circumvent this difficulty by questioning relatively broad ideas, as opposed to directly searching for an answer to a direct question.

The questions How is the text written? or What is its purpose? are broad enough to circumvent this; however, the questions Who writes them? and What is the occasion? fail to avoid the problem of context. This may prove not to be as much of a challenge as I anticipate, but it should remain a key consideration respecting the replicability and reliability of the research. Theoretically, one could replicate this method and gain similar results – especially considering that the application of these reports in the thesis is of an illustrative nature. They are here to provide insight into what happens in some policy networks. As for the qualitative analysis’s validity, it would be wise to remember that validity is contingent upon what I attempted to measure. In the case of the reports presented, I posit that their applicability as illustrations ‘softens’ the validity criteria in that the reader is in many ways complicit in its value. Naturally, it is valid to present reports and discuss them according to whatever criteria we posit as variables. In conclusion, is the qualitative analysis reliable, replicable and valid?

If I were to pick a different set of reports, I would use a procedure similar to the one I have here. I could easily replicate the analysis; there are contingencies on what questions I wish to ask in the first place. As Bratberg (2021) argues, the reports must be evaluated and analysed in the same way as in a randomised population. Broad questions, such as who wrote, what did they write and what it looks like, are simple to ask. Meaning, context and What is taken for granted? are questions that change a great deal when the reports change. This method is reliable, at least in the way it has been used here. Were I to increase the number of reports, I argue that the method would need to change. As for its validity, I once again posit that the analysis is valid in the context in which I have used it. Its context is illustrative – it is not here

to attempt to find ‘truth’, but increases the knowledge of how knowledge moves and is shared in a network.

3.2 Critical Realism and the Selection of Documents

Sayer (2010) writes, ‘Any serious consideration of method in social science quickly runs into basic issues such as the relation between theory and empirical observation and how we conceptualize phenomena’ (Sayer, 2010, p. 45).

Roy Bhaskar (1944–2014) developed a general philosophy of science that he describes as *transcendental realism*, as well as a special philosophy of the human sciences that he called *critical naturalism*. The combination of these two terms, developed later by other authors, creates the umbrella term *critical realism*. The allegory above is an attempt to visualise the theory of transcendental realism and its three categories: the Real, the Actual and the Empirical.

Transcendental realism argues that not only is our world divided into a real world and our knowledge of it, but it is also divided into the real, the actual and the empirical. The real describes the intransitive domain of things that exist (the real world): objects, their structures and their causal powers. Only through the real are objects and structures able to perform actions. They may not do them, but the real makes it possible. The actual are the events that occur, whether or not people realise they are happening. The empirical domain describes events that are experienced (Danermark & Ekström, 2019).

Following Danermark, Ekström and Karlsson’s (2019) arguments, critical realism’s previous name was *transcendental realism*, which attempted to ontologically transcend the empirical. *Critical* in this sense can be seen as expressing a critique of ‘flat’ empiricism (Danermark & Ekström, 2019). A second meaning of *critical*, more closely related to Bhaskar’s original use of the concept, is common philosophy’s application to the social sciences (Danermark & Ekström, 2019, p. 218). Its critique relates to how social science tends to individualise explanations or sociologise them, that is either complete and total individualism or the obliteration of the individual for the benefit of the collective or the structure (Danermark & Ekström, 2019). Respecting policy transfer, therefore, we may use a critical realistic perspective to enable a deeper understanding of how knowledge and, by extension, policy, move internationally and transnationally. Third, *critical* stresses the limited possibilities of science, critiquing universalist claims to truth often made in positivist social science. Fourth, critical can be associated with the original term for the application of transcendental realism

to social science: *critical naturalism*. Social phenomena can be explained concerning social causes when we expose generative mechanisms at the social level (Danermark & Ekström, 2019, pp. 218–219). Policy transfer networks, as (Legrand, 2021) found in his interviews, may emerge from social interaction. His interview subject explained exactly how the Belmont conference emerged from informal dinners between colleagues around OECD headquarters in Paris (Legrand, 2021, p. 200). The generative mechanism is the OECD, as an institution provides the necessary space for such interactions to take place.

As the social sciences deal with open systems, causal conditions in particular must be analysed as tendencies (Danermark & Ekström, 2019, p. 221). Reality is complex, making the notion of a ‘predictive’ science nearly impossible. In the case of policy transfer and policy transfer networks, we may find ourselves attempting to prove an elusive mechanism that exists at a time and place, often for short periods of time and within a place that may not be accessed. Critical realism contends that the task of the social sciences is to search for causal mechanisms of the events we study: Why are we transferring knowledge and policy internationally, and why are transfer networks ‘popping’ in and out of existence? Thus, predicting which knowledge is transferred and which networks emerge must be accomplished post facto.

Critical realism offers ontology, a theory of being and existence. Its epistemological attribute is, however, more open, meaning that this flexibility enables this philosophical approach to be used in a wide array of fields, but lends itself well to social research. It fits this research perfectly, because some of the ideas posed in this thesis sometimes operate within the field of the ‘unreal’. That is, the strands of communication connecting the Norwegian government and the OECD often exist only in documents and reports.

Official Norwegian reports (NOUs; *Norsk offentlig utredning*), white papers (*Meldinger til Stortinget*), emails between the OECD and the Norwegian government and official OECD documents provide empirical evidence for this thesis – providing informal, formal and real examples of interaction that enable us to discuss how agents within a network interact. This interactivity of networks permits the analysis of how these meetings work, what they entail for delegates and countries and what participants ‘get out of it’. Data was gathered from Norwegian websites, including regjeringen.no and e-innsyn, a platform that people can use to access official documents produced by state and local authorities in Norway (*eInnsyn – Innsyn i offentlig saksbehandling*, 2022).

Understanding how policy networks are created is interesting empirically, as they produce relevant materials for research. They are also helpful in considering education policy within the philosophical perspective of critical realism. We can clearly see policy being made, but the ideas they contain are those of the immaterial. From this perspective, a researcher may find himself or herself questioning why exactly *this* policy was made or *these* words were used to phrase it. Perhaps the authors or stakeholders in the making of policy were influenced by colleagues from elsewhere. However, where is *elsewhere*, and who are these colleagues, if not from the same government? Using critical realism, one may do just that. If the interest lies in something one knows is there, but cannot quite reach, it may allow the researcher to use empirical evidence to uncover knowledge about a larger phenomenon.

In the policy development process, there are always different actors at play, making most policy a collaborative effort between governments, NGOs and experts (Stone et al., 2020). In the case of Norway, as quickly alluded to earlier in the thesis, this process is institutionalised: There are formal steps to follow that must be and are documented. All meetings, emails and short communiques are stored in an electronic database. Norwegian law (Offentleglova – offl, 2009, § 1–2) dictates that all public proceedings are open and transparent – the creation of policy and the required communication fall under this. Moreover, eInnsyn, an online directory and database containing all these documents (emails, communiques, meetings and reports from said meetings), are readily available for download online: Who was there, who is who, and what role they played in these meetings.

Educational policy is like any policy in Norway. In this thesis, we are interested in the Royal Ministry of Education, and like any ministry in Norway (except the military), they are required to be as transparent as possible. This transparency is good, not only in a democratic sense but also for the purpose of research. Like all other ministries, they also appoint expert commissions when new policy is being made, which is used when creating reforms.

This thesis operates within a relatively loose timeframe, being mainly interested in the early to late 1990s, early to late 2000s, the 2010s and the 2020s. It might be more understandable to consider pre- and post-Programme for International Student Assessment and pre- and post-curriculum reform eras in Norwegian educational discourse and policy development.

This thesis also analyses documents connected to policy development. Who holds power in the policy development process? Who gets ‘in’ when policy is being developed, and who shares these ideas with stakeholders and policy officials? One hypothesis is inspired by the

interesting work from the University of Oslo project Policy Knowledge and Lesson Drawing in Nordic School Reform in an Era of International Comparison (POLNET). It states that, with linkages to globalisation and transnationalisation (Legrand, 2021), we can assume that we should see increased references to NGOs in NOUs (Steiner–Khamisi et al., 2020), as the policy development process is not a one-nation job. Domestic, regional and global history may all play a part in the development of policy, but this development does not happen in a vacuum. The argument here is that there are policy transfer networks that share knowledge. By utilising this knowledge, that is these ‘lessons’ learned by agents, perhaps we can see traces of policy found elsewhere.

A large part of this thesis is quantitative, based on the assumption that measurements tend to provide a type of evidence that appears different from the interpretations of interviews – often conceived of as ‘irrefutable’.

The aim of this thesis has been laid out earlier, but a short reminder may be useful: I want to find connections between the Norwegian policymaking process and the OECD to give insight into the policy development process and how policy travels across borders. My analysis aims at exploring how these connections and cooperation change and if and how these strands of interaction have become ever more connected over recent years. Since the Norwegian policymaking process uses a system of green and white papers and this system is institutionalised, the increased use of references to the OECD could mean that either the OECD is gaining authority in the field of education and education policy, or that we simply reference more and a natural by-product of this is increasing OECD referencing. As the analysis will prove, not only is the use of references increasing, but also references to the OECD are increasing more rapidly than other literature or evidence.

Naturally, just counting OECD references is not enough – we need some way to measure the importance of the documents in which these references are made. Simply counting would only show how these documents increase over time, and while that is interesting, we may experience difficulties drawing anything to discuss. This pointed me in the direction of centrality, a method of study that may help us distinguish important documents from less important documents. The way we do this is by bibliometrically analysing 483 selected documents – how many references do they have to OECD publications? The documents were sourced from a database created by and for POLNET in collaboration with the DH-lab at the National Library in Oslo (*DH-LAB / Nasjonalbiblioteket*, 2022.; Tröhler et al., 2023).

The shared database is designed to systematise references in policy documents by collecting and analysing bibliographic metadata extracted from sources referenced in policy documents across time. By using this data, the researchers of POLNET ‘examine how these sources are tied together into networks of references in and across reform-making processes in five Nordic countries’ (Karseth et al., 2022, p. 2). The database contains metadata such as titles, author/authors, year of publication, type of publication, place of publication, nationalities and organisations.

In the sample I have used for the quantitative study, the database consists of references to only white and green papers. The frequency of how often each document refers to another as well as co-citations serve as a principle for how to measure centrality and centrality betweenness. Both measures give any document a ‘degree of centrality’, which helps us distinguish a position in a network of nodes of documents. A document that others have referenced often has a higher ‘in-degree centrality’ than one seldom referenced, which provides insight into the document’s influence, here understood as seeing this document as more prominent than others. Importance, in Norwegian green and white papers, can thus be measured by assessing any document’s centrality (Steiner–Khamisi et al., 2020). The fact that I am studying Norwegian papers is important, as this indicates that the sources reflect a Norwegian context. As mentioned earlier, this is engrained in the policy-making process and, thus, is relatively unique.

The lists of documents with centrality measures were provided by the POLNET project in collaboration with the DH-lab at the National Library.⁴ Unlike the Nordic study, the sample I use covers all white and green papers produced and referenced over 30 years regarding all types of policy realms, including policy documents about preschool policy, policy on lower and secondary education, policy on higher education and other topics under the authority of the Ministry of Education in Norway. The lists – altogether, three overviews of documents ordered concerning centrality measures – served as a starting point for my work with the data, which I extended by entering data about the OECD publications referenced in the papers. The procedure I used to extend that database will be presented below. Using the data gathered from the bibliometric analysis, coupled with the fact that the green and white papers in the Norwegian context constitute a somewhat unique case of documentation, one perhaps

⁴ Although still in press, this is sourced from a chapter under development written by Sivesind, Tiplic and Johnsen in Tröhler et al. (2023). This chapter studies policy discourses across time and space, and it uses the very same dataset as this thesis.

can provide some questions and answers concerning what the level of influence of OECD literature and cooperation has in the Norwegian policy context. Using only quantitative data is naturally not enough, but it should provide an overview of the recognition of the OECD in a Norwegian context, which provides us with interesting findings. Knowing how this cooperation and use of OECD literature has developed and gaining insight into how thick-stranded it is may enable this thesis to gain an understanding impossible to achieve by interviewing or qualitatively analysing single documents. Using Microsoft Excel as the main software for documentation has proven both difficult and valuable – *difficult* in that Excel is hard to learn and operate and *valuable* in that learning Excel is priceless and that Excel is orderly. All figures in this thesis are the result of my own work with an Excel file. Hence, they are original results.

3.3 Typologies

A large (Excel) document containing references from green and white papers resulted from my own work with the database. This document contains links to the white and green papers assembled online, and I have extracted all OECD references made in the documents. Writing it chronologically, by frequency, concerning how many OECD documents were cited created a visible curve that will be presented below. In addition, it created ‘episodes’ of more references from the OECD in some years compared to others. Using these documents, the earliest ones from the late 1980s all the way to the late 2020s enabled me to visualise the data in line diagrams. These line diagrams also provide the added benefit of being able to identify how the use of OECD references has changed. Using these data and descriptive measures, I can draw conclusions concerning how the use of these references changes, as well as how the political context is extended to include an international domain of policy-relevant references. By extending the political context to include international references, I was able to provide information about trends based on the political interest in OECD documents.

Furthermore, I have distinguished between types of OECD documents to examine various influences of OECD literature. Therefore, this thesis also uses a typology made by Ydesen et al. (2022) and Baek (2021). The typology differentiates between types of OECD documents. These categories are: 1. Policy Reviews, 2. Global Progress Reports and 3. International Large-Scale Assessments. I will further describe these three types of OECD references.

3.3.1 Policy Reviews

Policy reviews consist of all policy reviews done by the OECD to (in this case) review the Norwegian education system or Nordic countries (e.g. Denmark, Sweden). These summaries typically involve a review of the past context and the current situation based on ILSA data (International Large-Scale Assessments), such as PISA, and recommendations for the future. These recommendations are often based on evidence gathered from other countries or governments (propinquity is key, politically, geographically or historically).

3.3.2 Global Progress Reports

Global Progress Reports are written by the OECD to give broad insight into the global education situation. What is happening, what are the trends, who does what and how do they do it? The titles of the documents are OECD 'Education at a Glance', 'Education Outlook' and 'Skills'.

3.3.3 International Large-Scale Assessment

International large-scale assessment, or ILSA for short, is what some call the backbone of the OECD educational agenda. These are PISA studies, Education GPS studies, and Jobs Surveys. These provide the hard data portion of the OECD's analytical framework.

While this thesis has gathered evidence through documents, I have also collected another type of evidence quickly alluded to above: communication between the OECD, the Royal Ministry of Education and the Educational Directorate of Norway.

MLA (multi-level analysis) will be used to analyse these documents at multiple levels.

Theoretically, one may consider these documents the product of multiple levels of government – thus, Evans and Davies' (2002) analytical framework may be used expediently. NOU 2014: 7 Students' Learning, for example, features 16 unique references to the OECD, as well as several instances of formal communication between the OECD and the Norwegian Government, especially regarding the OECD's Country Review.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Data

The Norwegian government has a long history of cooperation and participation with the world – joining the OECD in the late 1960s and participating in several studies (PISA, PIAAC and TALIS). Notably, Norway is a participant in the European Economic Area. Participation in international treaties or cooperation in this manner may also affect policy development. While this is interesting, this thesis will not go in-depth into this cooperation. The question remains how such communication and participation has inscribed knowledge into Norwegian policy development. How has Norway facilitated the process of policy transfer, and how has this developed?

The Norwegian government has facilitated international and transnational cooperation through an increasing interest in best practice solutions for its educational system. Policy transfer is often seen as a tool for remediating domestic issues, and remediating issues in the Norwegian context happens on multiple levels of government. The way Norwegians accomplish this is institutionalised through commissions that the government appoints to produce solutions for domestic problems. The products of these commissions are called *green papers* – they may contain recommendations the government uses when deciding new policy and reforms. These commissions are comprised of experts in their field, often at the doctoral level of academia. Some may have tenure in universities, and some may have multiple academic publications. They play an important role in this process, gathering information about or lessons learned from previous, similar difficulties. They may also use different national contexts characterised by their similarity. Sweden, for example, would be a candidate to consider when creating policy – given its historical, political and ideological similarities. The commissions may also seek help internationally during the development of policy: As the data in this paper suggests, OECD references are especially popular.

The focus on the OECD in this paper is not only because of their position as a leader in the educational agenda (Ydesen, 2019), but also because of the sheer number of references made to the OECD. While the volume of references is interesting, it is also worth mentioning that these references often note ‘best practice’ information gathered from scholars around the

world. Some may be produced directly by the OECD, such as ‘Educational at a Glance’ or ‘Educational Outlook’. Others may be scholarly written and OECD authorised.

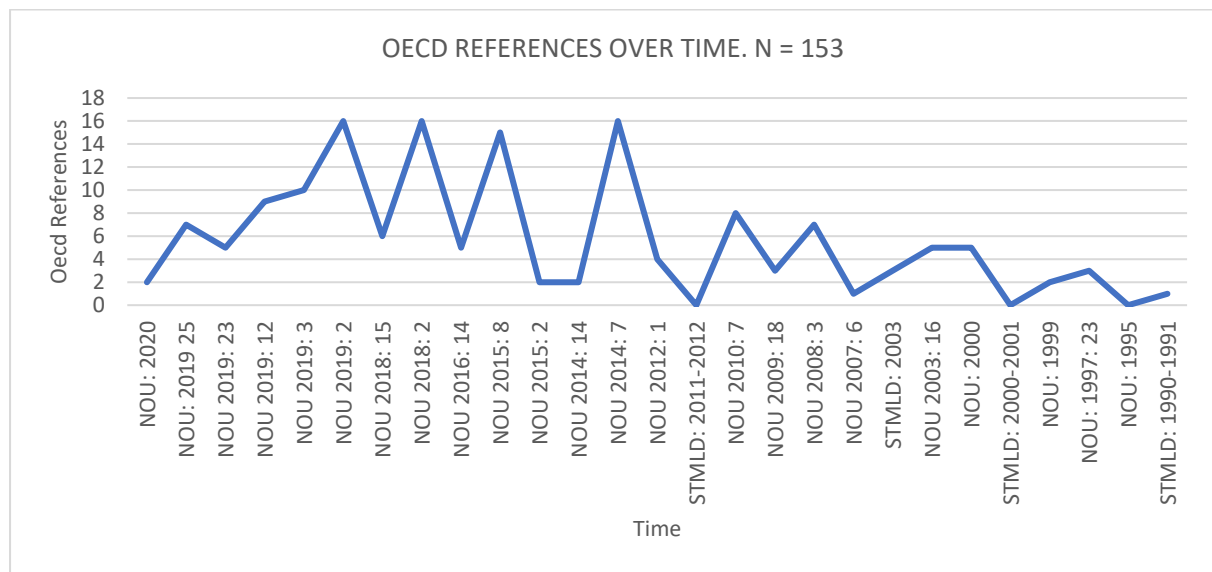


Figure 4.1 Figure: 2.1 OECD references over time. N = 153

The graph above (Fig 2.1) shows 153 references made to the OECD from the early 1990s to the 2020s. These documents were selected because they all concern competency or increasing knowledge. Sometimes the documents are related to future workplaces; other times, they are related to raising the general level of knowledge of students in Norway. Regardless, it is always about some form of ‘future improvement’. In particular, NOU 2019: 2 is interesting. NOU 2019: 2 ‘*Fremtidige Kompetansebehov*’, or ‘Competencies for the Future’, references 20 OECD sources, ranging from OECD-published research papers like *New Skills for the Digital Economy* (2016) to *Education at a Glance 2017* (OECD, 2017). Altogether, we observe a steady increase in references to the OECD over time, furthering the argument of internationalisation in the Norwegian educational context. The different types of references also have increased relatively steadily. The typology laid out by Ydesen et al. (2022) differentiated between three types of literature: International Large-Scale Assessment (ILSA), Global Progress Reports and Policy Reviews.

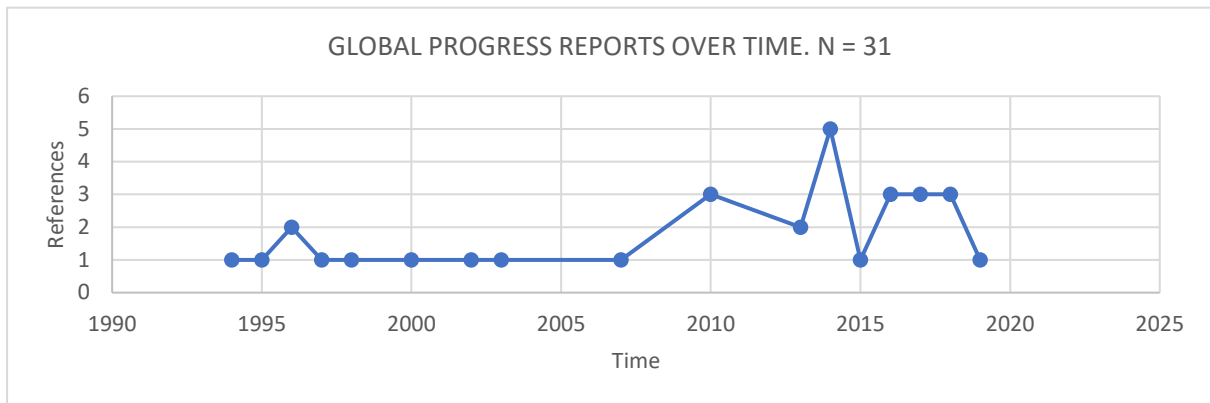


Figure 4.2 Global Progress Reports over time. N = 31

While these datasets are significantly smaller, the trend continues. Examining Fig 2.2, we observe Global Progress reports spiking in 2014. NOU 2014: 7 might be the cause of this, once again having the general theme of future skills and learning. Domestically, 2014 involved structural reform in the higher education sector. The OECD claims that internationally, and perhaps globally, we have slowly been moving out of a grand economic crisis (*Education at a Glance 2014*, p. 15).

Innovation and labour markets are similar themes in white paper 18 (2014–2015), NOU 2014: 7 and the OECD’s *Education at a Glance*, 2014.

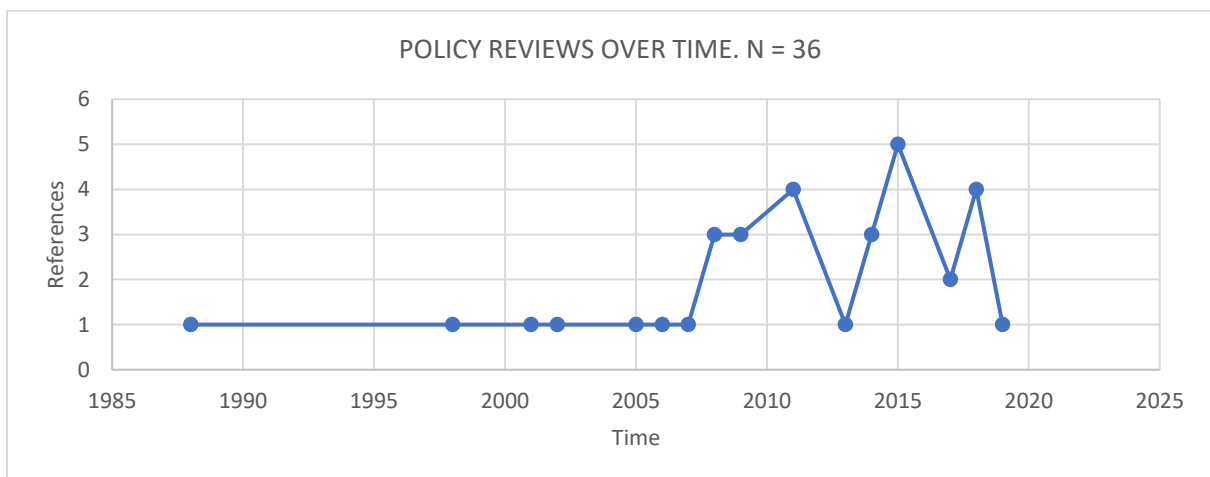


Figure 4.3. Policy reviews over time. N = 36.

Fig 2.3 presents the frequencies of policy reviews over time. A total of 36 documents share this typology, again trending positively and spiking in 2015. The spike might be attributed to NOU 2015: 8 *Fremtidens Skole* (School of the Future), which shares a similar theme to white

paper 18 (2014–2015), NOU 2014: 7 and EAG, 2014.

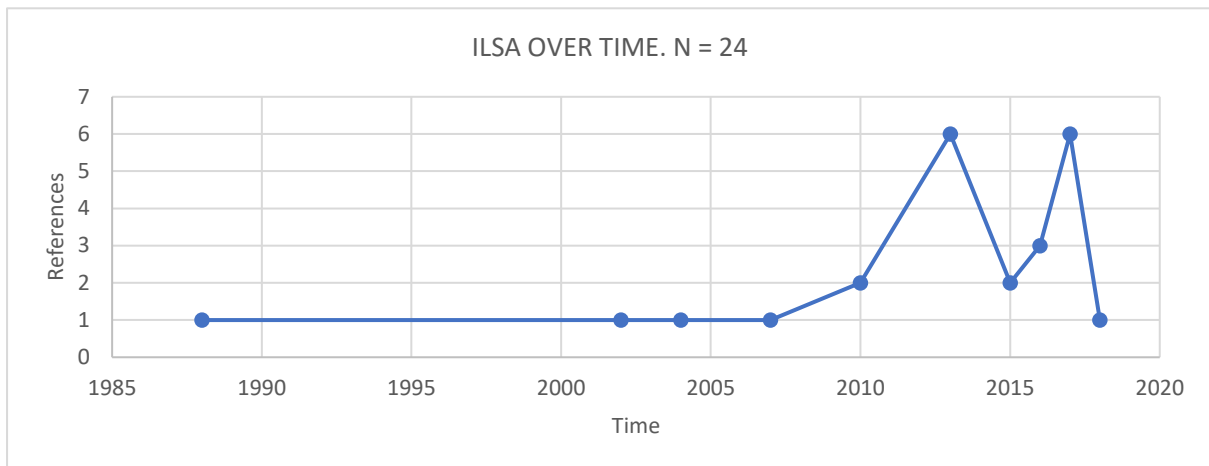


Figure 4.4. International Large-Scale Assessment over Time. $N = 24$.

Figure 2.4 contains ILSAs, or International Large-Scale Assessment papers over time, the smallest dataset. We have 24 references to ILSAs, spiking twice: once in 2013 and again in 2017. This graph shows OECD references in a selection of green papers and white papers from the early 1990s to 2020. As we can see, not only have the references increased over time, but also the graph, like the previous figures, appears to be spiking.

The product the government develops from green papers is called *white papers*. These white papers are the formal, government-issued papers created with the knowledge gathered by the commissions' green paper. Not everything from the green paper will make it through to the white paper – some knowledge is perhaps not relevant, necessary or helpful for the context of the white paper (Steiner–Khamisi et al., 2020).

Participation in international, transnational and global epistemic communities as well as closer cooperation in the educational sector, both internationally and transnationally, has made it so that a harmonisation of policy development that supports continued cooperation has been necessary. The product of this necessity has been further institutionalised. This general cooperation, global, international and transnational, facilitates transnationalisation and globalisation: The OECD works ever closer with the sovereign, sometimes even directly as a part of the development of reform and policy recommendations with the government-appointed commissions. More meetings, more cooperation and more recommendations transpire internationally with the EU or Anglo–Saxon countries and transnationally with OECD recommendations, cooperation and knowledge. Globally, we witness increased

participation and cooperation – the Bologna and Copenhagen processes are the clearest examples.

The use of references in the educational sector in Norway may reveal an increased interest in and use of international and transnational knowledge. Policy transfer is a phenomenon that both facilitates, maintains and increases transnationalisation and globalisation. We are not necessarily becoming more similar, but we are participating and cooperating more closely with the international community and transnationals. We are also using and gathering more knowledge created outside national borders. The use of global, international and transnational knowledge furthers this cooperation.

4.1.1 Centrality

Degree centrality is defined as the number of links incident upon a node (i.e. the number of ties that this node has; (Sharma & Surolia, 2013). However, if the ties have direction, this creates two separate measures of centrality. We call these *in-degree* and *out-degree centrality*, differentiated by how many ties are connected to a node (*in-degree*) and how many ties a node connects to others (*out-degree*).

Degree centrality in the case of bibliometrics is understood as a measure of how many connections an actor, in this case a green paper, has with other actors (Verger, 2022). In-degree centrality can be understood as how many times a document is *referenced* by other documents, as opposed to out-degree centrality, which can be understood as how many times a document *refers to* other documents.

In the use of international literature – selecting for OECD references in green and white papers – we can discern a sharp increase in OECD references with more in-degree documents (see Fig. 3.1). The method is as follows: I read each white and green paper and attempted to find a literature section. If there was one, I counted every single OECD-published literature or OECD report (this may be ILSA reports, Global Progress reports or Policy Reviews). If there was not, I searched the text using these codes: OECD, (OECD, Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation). The parentheses were important; they helped the search engine to differentiate whether it was mentioned in the text and being used as a

reference. Then I checked every hit in the search engine, threw out the ones only with OECD, and kept count of every unique OECD reference.

This looked something like OECD (1998) or (OECD, *Educational Outlook*, 2015). I counted them all and created five sections based on the *mean* percentage of the selection. For example, if a section has 50 documents and 25 of those contain a reference to the OECD, that will result in this section containing 50% of documents with OECD references. In a selection of 483 white and green papers, with 50-document increments sorting for centrality, I created these numbers:

- In the 0–50 section, we find 28 references to the OECD, with 14 out of 50 documents containing a reference to OECD reports or literature in either the literature section or the text. This means that 28% of this selection contained OECD references. This is Section 1.
- In the 150–200 section, we find 32 references to the OECD, with 12 out of 50 documents containing a reference to OECD reports or literature in either its literature section or its text. This means that 24% of this selection contained OECD references. This is Section 2.
- In the 250–300 section, we find 96 references to the OECD, with 17 out of 50 documents containing a reference to OECD reports or literature in either the literature section or this text. This means that 34% of this selection contained OECD references. This is Section 3.
- In the 350–400 section, we find 96 references to the OECD, with 22 out of 50 documents containing a reference to OECD reports or literature in either the literature section or the text. This means that 44% of this selection contained OECD references. This is Section 4.
- In the 434–483 sections, we find 183 references to the OECD, with 34 out of 50 documents containing a reference to OECD reports or literature in either the literature section or the text. This means that 65% of this selection contained OECD references. This is Section 5.

With this information in mind, one may draw a line diagram to visualise what this looks like. What Figure 3.1 expresses is that, when sorting for increasing centrality (a measure of references to and from a document), the documents are increasingly likely to use OECD literature or reports. This line diagram does not illuminate how many references are made. This line diagram used 50 increment sections from a selection of 483 white and green papers to visualise how the use of OECD references is increasing in relative frequency to other references when the importance of documents increases.

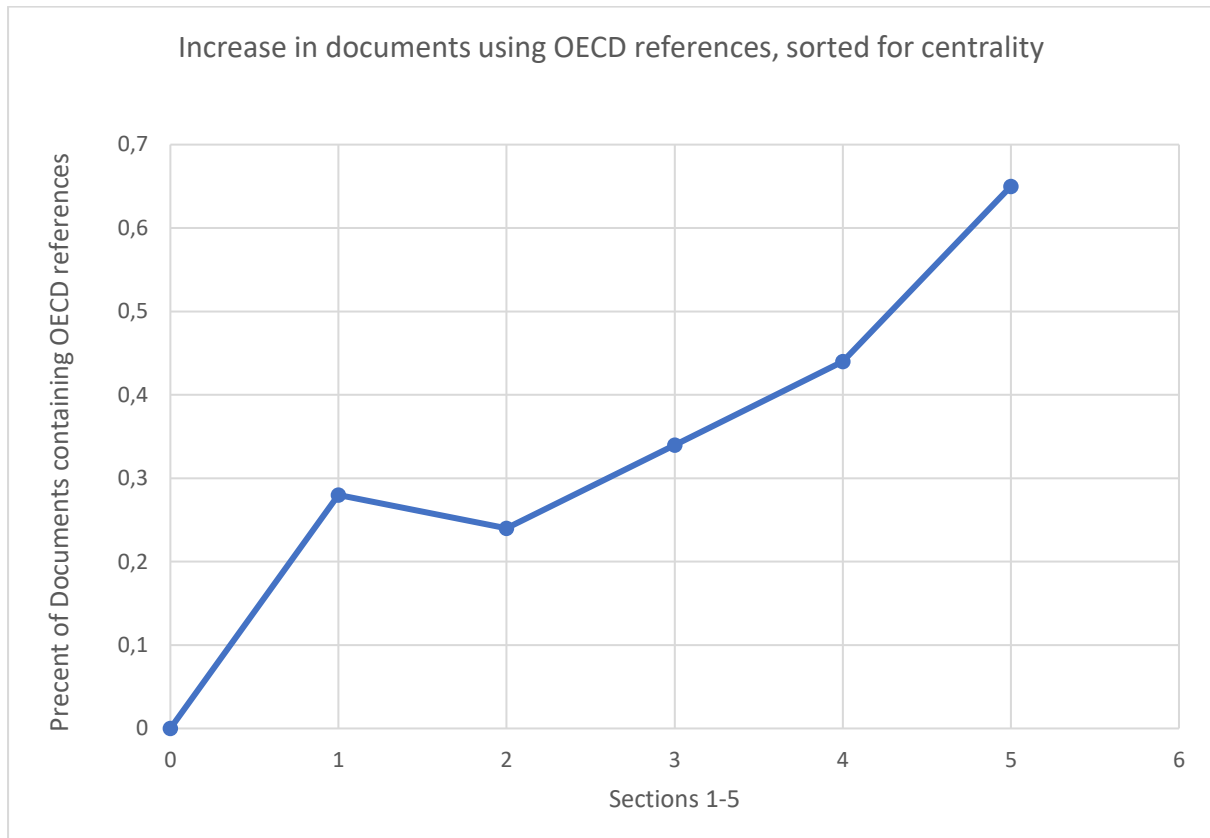


Figure: 4.5 Increase in Documents Using OECD References. N = 483.

While Figure 3.1 above may provide us with some insight into how the OECD gains influence, it is still important to keep in mind that while OECD references increase, so do all other types of referencing. Evidence-based governing and the increased use of evidence across all sectors are major factors concerning why references increase. The selection above is sorted for centrality, but many of these documents often reference a lot more in general. OECD documents are increasing, yes, but is this simply a product of the increased use of references, or are OECD literature, reports and large-scale assessments gaining authority at the cost of other knowledge in the policy-making process?

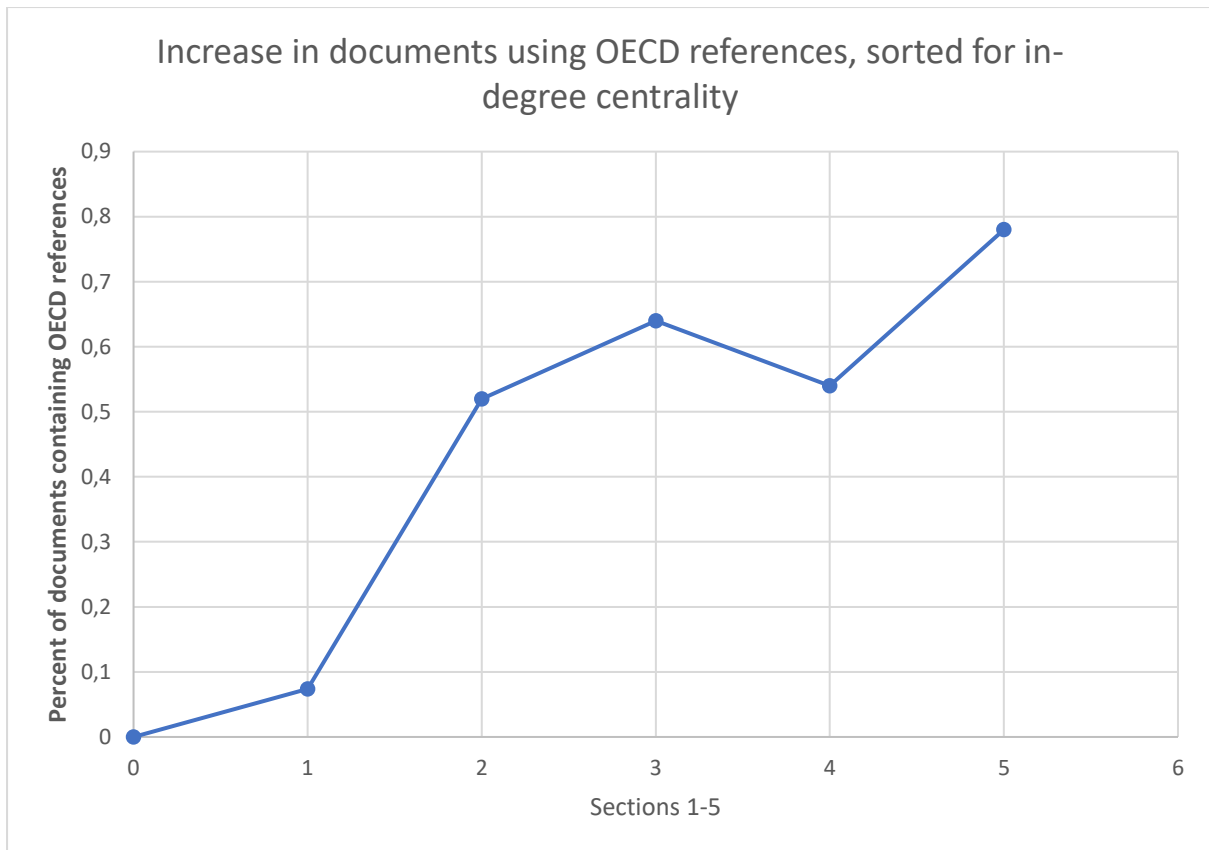


Figure: 4.6 Increase in Documents Using OECD References, Sorting for In-degree Centrality. N = 137.

The previous diagram provided information into how references made to the OECD increase as centrality increases, but as mentioned, all referencing seems to increase as the centrality of the data increases. This may be attributed to evidence gaining authority in governing. However, it does fall in line with a question this thesis raises: Is the OECD gaining influence in the policymaking process? Figure 3.2 is sorted for in-degree centrality, as opposed to simply being sorted for centrality. The difference here is the argument that in-degree centrality is a defining property of an important document. As we can see, OECD references increase as in-degree centrality increases. This, as opposed to our previous argument that all references increase, is slightly more nuanced. These documents do not always reference as much other documents in the selection. Nonetheless, we see a similar increase in the use of OECD references.

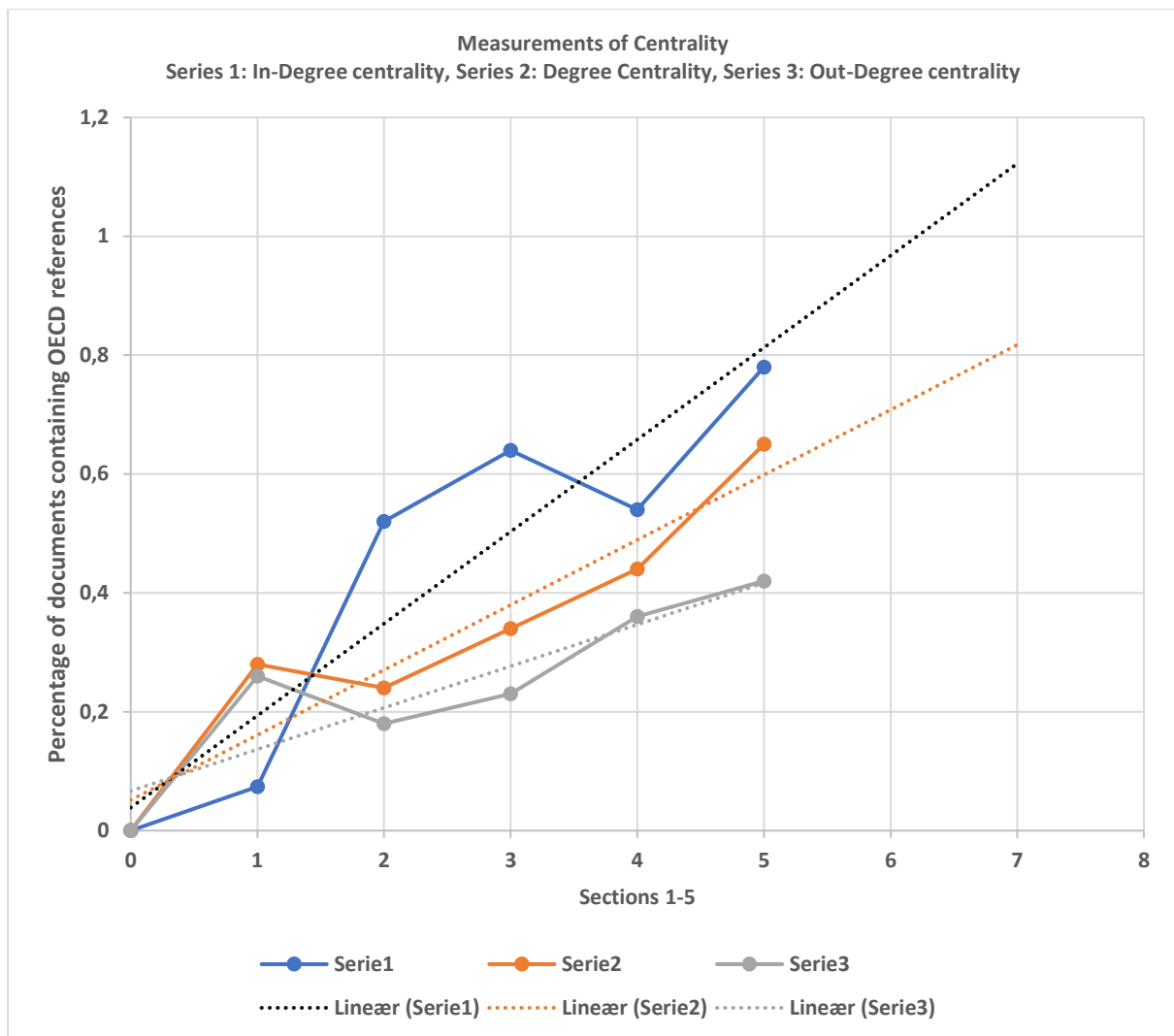


Figure 4.7 Relative Measurements of Centrality, $N = 483$.

Figure 3.3 depicts how these multiple selections look in comparison to one another. The blue line represents our in-degree centrality; the orange one, centrality. The grey line measures out-degree centrality.

Again, all these selections are picked in roughly the same way. We have 483 documents. As we go through this selection, we choose 50 documents from the bottom part of our sorted selection, ignore 50 of the documents, choose 50 documents, ignore 50 documents, choose 50 documents, ignore another 50 documents and then choose the top 50 documents in our large list. This leaves us with about 250 documents in each given category. The number is contingent upon how large the selection is, meaning that if this thesis had access to thousands of documents, the same method could have been applied and, perhaps, similar results could have been found. These lists, one for centrality, one for in-degree centrality and one for out-

degree centrality, were all sorted from low to high, meaning the documents were rising in-degree.

This indicates that, as the centrality of our selection of documents increases, so does the likelihood that they will contain OECD documents. Certainly, the selection of 50 does have an increased percentage of documents containing a reference to the OECD literature.

Data gives some insight into whether the use of OECD literature is increasing, giving ample information to discuss later in this thesis. Earlier in my analysis, I employed three typologies made by Ydesen et al. (2022) for OECD literature. One was ILSA, one was Global Progress Reports and one was Policy Reviews. It would now be interesting to examine which of these types of documents increases as centrality increases. Let us start with in-degree centrality, as this is our measurement of importance.

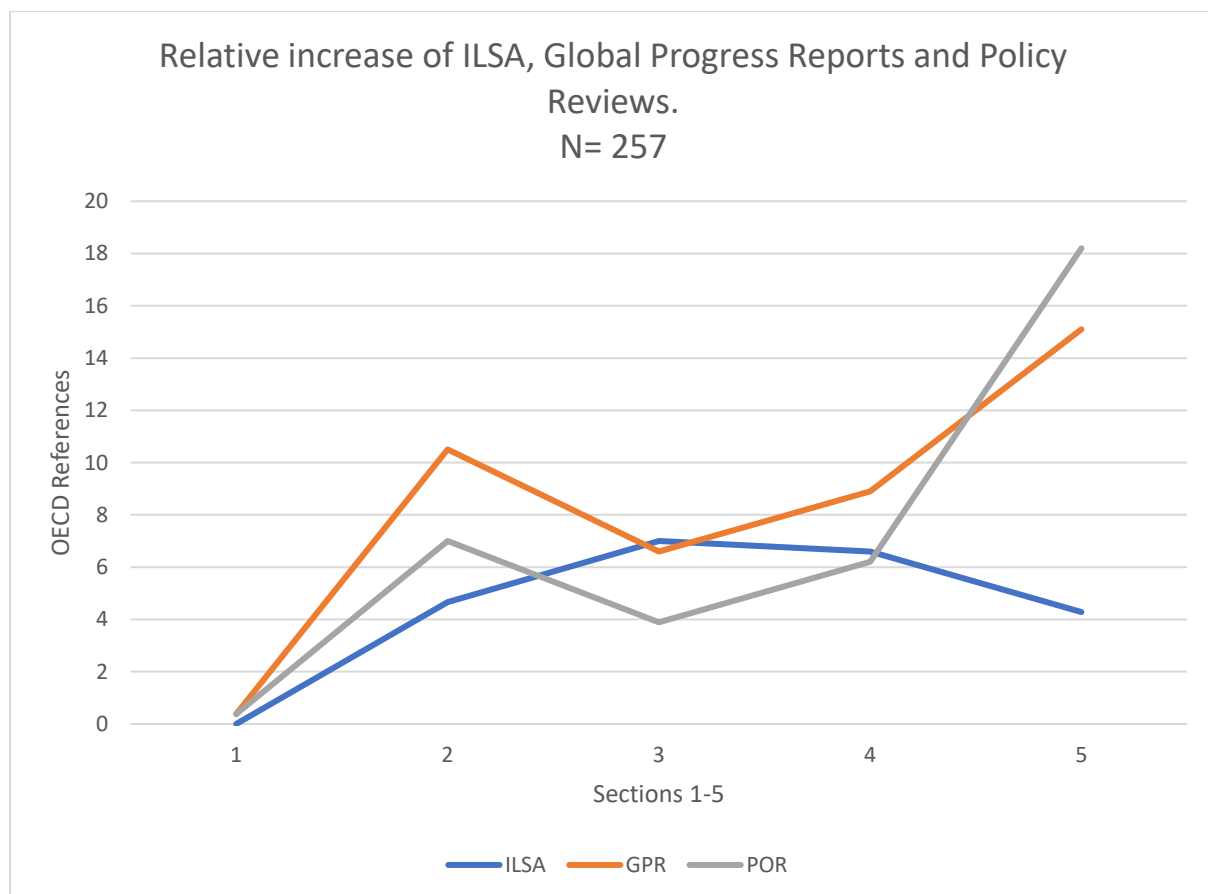


Table 4.8 Relative increase of ILSA, Global Progress Reports and Policy Reviews

I have used the same selection as earlier, only this time pulling out the typologies I used earlier in our analysis and operating a similar method as before. I divided the selection into five smaller sections sorted for increasing centrality. The Y-axis represents how the percentage of the typologies varies as centrality increases. The more central the selection, the more or less of these types of documents there are. What is striking here is that international large-scale assessments appear to decrease as centrality increases, which may be counterintuitive. Surely, in an evidence-based government, one would assume that scores matter. Global Progress Reports and Policy Reviews are rising – policy reviews displaying the largest spike as centrality increases. When these documents refer to OECD literature, reports or studies, they often do so with the intention of presenting solutions to problems. Global Progress Reports and Policy Reviews may be the easiest way to present such evidence. Policy reviews are often the product of OECD and governmental cooperation, such as ‘OECD (2011) OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education. Norway. Paris: OECD Publishing’. I will discuss this further in the discussion section.

4.2 Qualitative Data

For now, I move towards a more qualitative section of my analysis, namely reports and documents from network meetings. As a starting point, I will analyse an OECD INES-NESLI-11 document. The network for the collection and adjudication of system-level descriptive information on educational systems, policies and practices (NESLI) and INES (Indicators of Education Systems) are the (self-named) authoritative source of accurate and relevant information on education around the world. INES is the collective effort of multiple expert groups in the OECD LSO network, or the Network on Labour Market, Economic and Social Outcomes of Learning. The LSO is composed of OECD countries, partner countries and international organisations responsible for developing education indicators in the context of the OECD INES project (OECD, 2017). This section of the thesis is primarily illustrative, meant to give the reader insight into how these meetings function. This is the very reason it was designed in the manner I have described. The first report, INES-NESLI 2014, has been copied as faithfully as possible to its original form. I have made the boxes with ‘The Network’ inside. It is important in this context because I argue that it demonstrates the importance the network has in the collective opinion of the network.

INES-NESLI 2014 Report

The document in question is the 11th meeting of the INES network for the collection and adjudication of system-level descriptive information on educational structures, policies and practices (NESLI). This meeting took place on 5 and 6 March 2014 in Warsaw, Poland. This is considered a network; therefore, there are *delegates* from Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

There are other organisations present as well, such as the European Commission and Eurydice. These meetings follow the formula of a speaker, and then ‘the Network’ answers. This meeting starts with Mr Thomas Snyder of the United States’ opening the meeting. Subsequently, Mr Mrzemyslaw Krzyzanowski, Undersecretary of the Polish Ministry of National Education, and Mr Piotr Dmochowski–Lipski, Director of the Centre for Education Development, welcome the members of the network.

‘The Network’ thanked the undersecretary for:

‘... his inspiring, thoughtful words which gave great perspective into NESLI work and reminded us how important the data produced by NESLI and the OECD is for policy makers and the public debate and congratulated him for the excellent progress Poland has made in PISA, not only in improving the average scores dramatically but also in reducing disparities between students, and thanked Piotr Dmochowski–Lipski for his powerful introduction to the work done by the Centre for Education Development regarding teacher education and congratulated the centre for their wide range of activities’.

Subsequently, Mr Snyder presented the objectives for the meeting, as well as a progress report of events since the 10th NESLI meeting and the approval of the summary record from the 10th meeting of the INES Nesli Network. Following the opening, Ms Jean Yip provided an update on INES and INES-related activities, including upcoming INES-related meetings, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Teaching and Learning

International Survey (TALIS), the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the agenda of the INES Working Party meeting, the agenda of the LSO Network meeting and the planning and progress in preparation for the 2014 edition of *Education at a Glance*.

‘The network’ then:

‘... welcomed the update on INES and INES-related projects; welcomed the progress made for the 2014 edition of *Education at a Glance*; asked to have more than two weeks to review the tables and charts of the 2014 edition of *Education at a Glance* and suggested countries sending in their comments on a flow basis; and stressed the importance of having more discussions on the development of the conceptual framework of new indicators and surveys’.

Following the network feedback, Ms Magdalena Gorowska–Fells presented facts and figures for the Polish education system. Included was an overview of the administration and supervision of the education system, the legislation and the organisation of education and training in Poland.

‘The network’ then:

‘... thanked Ms Magdalena Gorowska–Fells for the interesting presentation on the Polish education system; expressed interest in: the means that parents use to prepare their children to succeed in the national examinations, which are decisive for students’ future and the need for further research on the impact of private tutoring (shadow education); the lowering of the starting age of compulsory education and parents’ concerns on this reform: policies to make the teaching profession more attractive.

Thanked Mr Michael Sitek for his inspiring presentation on the changes in the Polish education system and the improvements in education performance and expressed its interest in the research perspective and the use of international comparative data to address the challenges met by the Polish education system’.

Ms Jean Yip provided an overview of ISCED 2011, focusing on the differences between ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011. She also presented the schedule for ISCED 2011, its implications for NESLI surveys and its implementation in annual NESLI surveys (i.e. the joint Eurydice–OECD Instruction Time data collection and the NESLI Teachers’ Salaries and Working Time data collection), the NESLI trend data collections (trends in teachers’ salaries and trends in the number of teaching hours per year) and the new NESLI surveys currently under development (the student demand for tertiary educations survey, the tertiary faculty salaries survey, the evaluation and assessment survey and the funding formulae and allocation mechanisms survey).

‘The network’ then:

‘...thanked the Secretariat for the useful discussion on the changes in ISCED–2011 and welcomed its implementation in the NESLI data collections; agreed to collect data on pre-primary education only (ISCED–P 020) and recommended to flag countries with no distinction between ISCED–P 010 and 020 in the tables with a footnote of their specific situation in the text; stressed that collecting data on early childhood education development (ISCED-P 010) is still premature as many countries may not have programmes for children aged zero to two years that meet the definition of ISCED-P 010 (i.e. at least two hours of educational component per day); and agreed to update the diagrams of education systems in the Education GPS platform’.

The meetings proceed in this manner, touching on improvements to the indicator on teachers’ salaries relative to wages of workers with tertiary educations, improvements to 2014 NESLI teachers’ salaries and working time data collection, tasks required of teachers within the policy framework, results from the Joint Eurydice–OECD instruction time data collection, results from the NESLI Developing Teachers’ Knowledge and Skills survey, funding formulae and allocation mechanisms, and finally ending on evaluation and assessment.

This document, and the reason for its inclusion in this thesis, is that with the ordering of this document, a report from the Norwegian delegate followed. I will go through this document; this part is translated from Norwegian to English. If a section starts with ‘N’, that is the Norwegian delegate’s writing. If the ‘N’ is not present, it is the report’s.

This document is rich with information, but luckily, the delegation was nice enough to make summarising conclusions that I will examine. Hopefully, the excerpts and my interpretations will illuminate the Norwegian side of the delegacy focused on when attending these meetings. I will not go through the entire document due to the formal size of the thesis . However, I will go through key features to enable me to understand how these meetings develop through communication between actors and what the Norwegian delegate chooses to focus on by reporting to the Royal Ministry of Education in Norway.

INES–NESLI 2014. Norwegian Delegates Report

The report is divided into multiple parts, with subcategories identified as five key features. I will focus on these subcategories, as follows:

1. The network’s plan and agenda, for example ‘3. International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED–2011)’
2. Its reviews of the previously discussed theme
3. The Norwegian delegate’s evaluation
4. Report
5. Follow-up

I will examine interesting aspects of this document that reflect how actors communicate and interact, translated into English as closely to the original meaning as possible. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED–2011): ISCED2011 will be implemented in EAG2015 and applied from the data collection in 2014.

Evaluation

‘N: For Norway’s part, it looks unproblematic to implement ISCED2011 in our reports to the OECD. The only challenge may be the distinction between ISCED 01 (early childhood education designed for children under three years) and ISCED 02 (pre-primary). In Norway, data are mostly gathered for the entire ISCED 0, but the intention is that SSB (Statistics Norway) shall estimate to distribute the data on the two groups. We do not know how this shall be done or if it matters to all data we are supposed to report’.

Report

'N: Most countries only have data for ISCED02, but Finland, Sweden and Denmark have the same challenge as Norway. We do have some data for ISCED0 collected, but other data are reported by age. NESLI concludes with ISCED02 with a footnote in tables and a textbox, which explains that some countries report for the entire ISCED0.

Follow-up

N: ISCED–11: Because of the new ISCED, we must update the illustration of the education system. We'll receive an order on this.

Report on teachers' salaries and working time and developing teachers' knowledge and skills

5.1 Improvements to teachers' salaries and working time data collection and indicators (D3 and D4)

The network reviewed and agreed on the new draft table on teachers' salaries relative to wages of workers with tertiary educations by age and by gender (EAG2014).

N: In the last meeting, it was decided that we would gather numbers on actual salaries distributed on age-based intervals and gender. These numbers are compared with salaries for others working with tertiary educations.

Evaluation

N: Norway is one of 13 countries that have delivered such numbers and support the publication of them in the paper version.

Report

N: Decided to add new columns in the tables in EAG, as well as publish the entirety of tables on the web'.

Review the merits of using teachers with minimum qualifications and 15 years of experience vs. using teachers with typical qualifications to use for each indicator (EAG2015)

Evaluation

‘N: This is a proposal from Norway. Today, data on salaries for teachers with minimum education and 15 years of experience are used to compare across countries. We argue that it is more beneficial to use typical/most common education because this category (may) be more comparable, as we don’t know how large a share of teachers have minimum education in the different countries and we may therefore risk comparing marginal groups. A consequence of changing is that we would have to deliver new data for the calculation of trends back to 2000.

Report

N: Decided to change to typical, but the secretary was urged to make the change clear in the EAG.

Follow-up

N: Teachers’ salaries: we must deliver historical data on statutory teacher salaries for teachers with typical qualifications. We’ll receive an order on this from NESLI’.

Here, we can see how the Norwegian delegacy interacts within the international network. In the latter example, the Norwegian delegates are pushing to change how the LSO group differentiates between groups of teachers, fearing the risk of comparing marginal groups and thus weakening the evidence. What is interesting about how the Norwegian delegacy reports on these discussions is that they are simple, with limited interaction from the Norwegian side. In a sense, the communication seems to embrace interaction in a passive way, not in the sense that the delegacy is not voting or taking part in the decision-making process, but rather as a participant which, in this example anyway, does not make demands or push actively for change.

OECD–CSTP 2012. Norwegian Delegates Report

In another report from the Royal Ministry of Education with the title ‘Involvement in and Spread of OECD Work in Science, Technology and Innovation’, I find another characteristic trait of interest to analyse how policy networks operate. This meeting has multiple actors from the Norwegian Science Council, the Royal Ministry of Education, Statistics Norway, the Norwegian Delegation to the OECD and the Nordic Institute for Studies on Innovation, Science and Education. This document is from 2012 regarding the OECD CSTP Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy.

A policy officer from Norway, Petter Skarheim, who served as a director for the Directorate of Education in Norway, wrote an orientation on current issues in the OECD:

‘The OECD has their attention pointed towards economic crisis and now have a wider thematic (family, equality etc.) and geographical orientation (BRICS and developing countries) than before. The Norwegian work in science and technology works well, but has room for improvement. It would be wise to consider whether the area of science could learn from experiences from the area of education, which in the last years has gotten multiple publications that are both innovative and wake interest in the member countries. There are good chances for compliance in the OECD for initiatives’. (Skraheim, 2012, p. 1)

Following this is the section ‘How Can We in a Better Way Utilise Results from OECD Work in Norway?’

‘The OECD publish documents of high quality that are relevant for Norwegian actors, but which are currently underutilised. Difficulties which were put forward were the large number of reports, too little systematic sharing of knowledge beyond the knowledge which follow participation in workshops and similar work, bureaucratic agendas and the OECD’s lacking communication strategies (for example that reports aren’t publicly open online)’. (Skarheim, 2012, p. 1)

‘Points of Conclusion

- Should prioritise a selection of important publications (for example STI Outlook, STIG), where we arrange workshops or similar work.
 - Use the meetings in the ‘scientific community’ also to discuss reports – for subject-specific discussions – not only strategic/bureaucratic themes.
 - Look at instructions for delegates (express responsibility for dissemination).
 - Norway should work for those OECD documents, and data should be freely available. Delegates should bring this up in meetings and committees, and in projects that Norway participates in, a share of the funds should be ‘earmarked’ for the publication of documents.
 - We should also consider whether we should take more initiative to establish projects. An example could be to look at higher-education institutions – research and higher education. This is an area that may fall slightly between ‘science’ and ‘education’.
- (Skarheim, 2012, pp. 1–2)

There are some remarkable parts of this excerpt that are relevant for discussion, especially in discussing how to better utilise OECD data and documentation. Significantly more important is the discussion on how to gain compliance for Norwegian initiatives in the OECD. The quote from the delegate earlier explicitly argues for this. This may very well be an example of using influence to gain priority for Norwegian projects. At the same time, there is a push for open science and information, an example of agenda setting.

Without discussing this further, this attitude towards ‘changing agendas’ or gaining influence based on merit is in accordance with what Legrand describes in his own interviews (Legrand, 2021, pp. 201–202). Granted, the example Legrand (2021) alludes to is primarily about how the Anglosphere works together, but it exemplifies how the OECD is subject to changing influences, agendas and fluctuating power.

The Nordics are interesting in this sense, transferring competency and best practices, as in the case of Finland. Concerning sheer economic influence, the Belmont conference, as Legrand (2021) presents in his paper, is monumental. It contains the Anglosphere, or the USA, the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The Nordics, containing Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland, are hard to compare regarding economic influence, but perhaps the Nordics’ long-standing position of how ‘it should be’ matters greatly, the normative standard

of education. In the OECD's education agenda, Finland and the Nordics often score well on PISA and the other ILSA, giving Nordic expertise a sense of authority.

Concluding my analysis, I have reported on how the OECD is gaining influence by being inscribed in Norwegian documents and thereby enacted within educational policy development. This thesis measures influence as a product of the references used and in which documents these references are being used. As an allegory, we may consider green and white papers as discursive actors in the political sphere, and the arguments used are looking increasingly in line with the OECD economic agenda. I make this argument based on findings in the quantitative section of the analysis, where I have gathered OECD references used in a selection of 483 green and white papers. Doing this on its own proves little concerning how messages from the OECD are used at the micro-political level. Therefore, I had to find a way to specify the selection of documents and the level of described content further. I approached this aim in a couple of ways. First, I identified the products of how OECD publications are referenced over time, where I showed a slight increase across three periods. Seeing how the use of references varies over time provides insight into what *kinds* of information and knowledge gain importance. This led me to apply a typology that allowed me to divide the selection into three *kinds* of OECD literature and to analyse how these three types gained prominence over time. The analysis showed that ILSA, Global Progress Reports and Policy Review literature have increased similarly. Comparing this pattern with regard to the degree centrality of the source documents demonstrates promising results. In our largest selection of 483 green and white papers, I have also attempted to analyse how OECD literature increases, decreases or shows little change as the prominence increases. This has been accomplished through in-degree, out-degree and centrality analyses. Where high in-degree value means that these green and white papers are often referenced by other green and white papers, out-degree means that these green and white papers often reference other literature, and centrality measures the documents' centrality, combining the two various measures, in the complete network of references. In-degree centrality is, by extension, a measurement of importance in a bibliography (Ball, 2018).

What I have determined with this analytical strategy is that documents with high in-degree centrality correspond with an increasing degree of utilisation of OECD literature.

Consequently, I further the argument that OECD literature is gaining influence in Norwegian education policy.

OECD meetings, especially GSF or NESLI meetings, have been exciting to analyse. These meetings are exactly what they appear to be: open, formal forums used for discussing not only policy, but also general cooperation. NESLI LSO stands out, being cooperation designed to increase OECD data and documentation on its members, exemplified by reports from Norwegian delegates. How do we deliver data, how do we want to do it, what are our incentives and what reservations do we have? The OECD, as mentioned earlier, may be construed as a very formal, legal cooperation, when it is more of a ‘watering hole’ for various actors working in tandem to share information. It is up to each member to decide what they want from these meetings and how they choose to interact. In the Norwegian context, the delegate has been tasked with pushing for making OECD literature and data more open to the public, or how the Norwegian side should be taking more initiative to establish projects. Workshops were highly regarded. This was not entirely surprising, considering that these meetings often take shape as exactly that. This thesis has gathered meeting reports; unfortunately, some of these reports were difficult to obtain. The reason is interesting. They contain Norwegian negotiation strategies, which are illegal to disclose to the public if there are ongoing negotiations. In any case, both the use of OECD literature and the participation in networks like the GSF or NESLI LSO gives insight into how thick-stranded the cooperation between the OECD and the Norwegian government is and gives evidence towards Norwegian agenda-setting attempts in OECD networks.

5.0 The interest in what the future holds

Looking at the findings, one thing is clear: the increase in using OECD references begs the question of what this means in terms of policy transfer influence. The purpose of this chapter is to use the data I have gathered, qualitatively and quantitatively, to discuss this overall research problem and three research questions: 1. To what extent do white and green papers published and referenced by the Ministry of Education between 1988–2022 reference the OECD, 2. how do propinquity and knowledge networks give insight into policy transfer in the Norwegian education policy context understood through reception and reaction to OECD policy during the last few decades, and, 3. how do state officials interact as agenda-setters with OECD representatives in international network meetings?

The data on their own are interesting, but they need to be discussed in context guided by the research questions. By referring to the first research question, the thesis illuminates the OECD's rising authority in Norwegian education politics as a consequence of an ever-thickening network of interaction and cooperation. I find support from the findings from the quantitative bibliometric data, and also the qualitative data gathered from reports, to make this statement. Let me reiterate: there have been an increases in the volume of referenced OECD documents over time, in OECD literature in the more prominent green papers, and in steady communication with the international network of Norwegian state officials and representatives from elsewhere. There may be multiple reasons as to why this increase in OECD literature has occurred: one being increasing focus on the potential production value of a well-educated citizenship, and another being the OECD having gained a position of a normative conductor of educational matters, with the latter being the wisest to explore first.

Evidence-based governing can be considered somewhat of a buzzword in Norwegian politics. What it means is what it implies: when decisions are being made, policies are written, and laws are enacted, they should be based on knowledge and evidence. It would almost seem unfair to say that evidence-based policy-making is a buzzword only in Norwegian politics. Rather, as Antoni Verger (2021) argues, evidence-based policy-making is currently considered the most appropriate approach to public policy formulation (Karseth et al., 2022). The term is something every government, sitting or in opposition, likes to align themselves with, as it pairs very well with current trends of accountability, transparency, and better governance (Davies et al., 2000). When producing new policy in the context of Norway, the process through which green papers are commissioned and white papers are produced is

institutionalized. Preceding a white paper, there will almost always be a green paper produced first. Green papers are ordered, commissioned. Therefore, this process is not immune to political agendas, as it is subject to translation. Steiner-Khamsi et al. (2020) found that in a selection of five green papers resulting in two white papers, only 9.5% of the references cited in the green papers carried over to the white papers. These are major white papers and green papers, and an interesting finding is that the green paper *In the First Row* (NOU 2003: 16) shared the most references with the corresponding white paper. Steiner-Khamsi et al. (2020) argued that this may be because of a combination of the composition of the commission and its specific mandate. Strikingly, this green paper used a multitude of OECD references as its evidence and scores high on in degree centrality in the data set. The OECD's authority is important here. Like I alluded to earlier, the references made to OECD literature will in many cases consist of global progress reports—literature which gives a broad picture of how and what different contexts are doing to remediate their own domestic difficulties. As a political system, we are interested in Swedish-context and Danish-context solutions.

There are also the Policy Reviews—specific recommendations made by the OECD tailored to the Norwegian context. These increase in popularity as centrality increases, which is not surprising, considering that commission mandates oftentimes are specific and ordered (i.e. solve problem X'). In the case of *In the First Row* (NOU 2003: 16), its mandate was to evaluate the length and scope of compulsory and upper-secondary education. What do we expect our students to have learnt when finishing compulsory education, and what skills are we expecting them to have mastered by the time that they are supposed to be ready for tertiary education? Interestingly, this green paper focuses heavily on recommendations from the OECD, making a case for a competency-based curriculum. The majority (82%) of the most in-degree documents (Section 5, Figure 3.2) contain a reference to OECD literature, but not all are made equal. While some may reference a lot, and thus contain many OECD references such as NOU *Competencies for the Future* (2020, my translation), which contains 25 unique OECD references, others may reference the OECD less, such as NOU *In the First Row* (2013), which only contain five unique OECD references. The difference, as it turns out, is what type of literature is being used.

In the analysis, I found that when we use our typologies on white and green papers sorted for in-degree centrality, ILSAs appear less frequently, and the number of Global Progress Reports and Policy Reviews increases (Table 3.4). When the commissions are developing

green papers, they rely on expert knowledge to advance arguments, with the point of evidence-based governance being that knowledge should be at the forefront of the decision-making process, enabling the white papers to be as well-informed as possible. The increase in Global Progress Reports and Policy Reviews does thus not come as a surprise, as this type of evidence will oftentimes be presented in the format of statistics, which is easily translatable into the decision-making process. Ydesen (2019) discusses how the OECD solidified its agenda-setting power, and perhaps one can credit some of its power to the information they can produce. As the state becomes increasingly interested in quantifiable data and knowledge, statistics and economics lend themselves to this purpose very neatly, and the OECD is designed around this concept (i.e. statistically evidenced policy advice). One OECD document has appeared more frequently than others in green papers, especially around the early 2000s: *The First Years of Tertiary Education: Norway in Thematic review of the transition from initial education to working life: Norway: Country Note* (Briseid et al., 1998).

This report features a comprehensive analysis of the Norwegian education system, focused on tertiary education. In this report, there is praise of transparency, networks of governance, low unemployment rates, and strong economic growth, but also critique, which is directed at the weak links between tertiary education and the labour market, claiming that students must often wait 3–4 years before being able to access the courses they want and therefore their careers as well. This is discussed a little later in this chapter. The weak economic base for educational policy is also put into question, arguing that policy that promotes the personal growth and development of the individual is in higher demand. While the critique is an interesting subject in and of itself, it is perhaps more interesting that NOU 2003: 16 *In the First Row* later references this critique—referring to OECD recommendations.

This is not new; the OECD has been used to legitimize arguments made by commissions for a long time (Verger, 2022b, p. 401), but what is not relatively new is the increased rate of which the OECD is referenced, as well as which green papers are referencing them. This includes important green papers such as NOU 2003: 16, NOU 1999: 33 and newer green papers such as NOU 2009: 18 and NOU 2019: 2. These are all green papers being referenced by both green and white papers at a larger scale than others—all having OECD data and knowledge as legitimizing evidence. In some cases, our selection had above 80 percent of documents containing OECD reports.

We can see that the largest spikes in OECD referencing happened in the 2014–2019 period; let's extract the documents with the most references in them:

- NOU 2014: 7 Elevenes læring i fremtidens skole
- NOU 2015: 8 Fremtidens skole
- NOU 2018: 2 Framtidige kompetansebehov I
- NOU 2019: 23 Ny Opplæringslov

Out of these four green papers, only NOU 2018: 2 *Competencies for the Future I* is placed in the higher middle bracket of centrality. The three others are all placed in the higher bracket of centrality, meaning that they are considered important green papers; all of them have at least 10 OECD references, and thematically only NOU 2019: 2 is not centred around 'the future' as a common theme. What does this information mean?

Qualitatively, these are all relatively commonly themed papers centred around 'the future'. The future has been and continues to be an area of heated discourse in the educational sector. Perhaps this is because the employability of students is of high concern, or there is a value-driven discussion about what education is and should be. NOU 2018 and NOU 2014 are especially centred on employability. NOU 2018: 2 *Future Competencies I* is especially interested in a changing labour market, arguing that 'we must prepare for large changes in competency needs. Some by cause of demographical change, digitalization, innovation, and other development features which have already happened' (NOU 2018: 2, p. 7). In this green paper, they cite OECD several times, but they also reference meetings with the OECD to discuss labour policy. These meetings are documented; the OECD and the Ministry for Education regularly communicate and discuss policy in formal and informal ways, oftentimes in larger meetings such as the Global Science Forum, CSTP, or the LSO network.

What is striking about this specific green paper is that it is centred around the labour market's connection with the education sector, being focused on a labour market in need of specialized knowledge and competencies and seeking ways to remediate this through the education complex. Because of this economically aligned focus, they cite the OECD heavily, using 16 unique types of literature ranging from OECD working papers focused on literacy skills among the ageing population to Economic Surveys by the OECD. When discussing earlier literature in this field, we briefly discussed the economic agenda of the OECD, arguing that while their interest in education is relatively new, their interest in the labour market is long standing. This green paper falls into the category in between these two fields, the knowledge

economy. The knowledge economy is not new. Envisioning education as a tool for economic growth can be traced as far back as John Locke (Locke & Yolton, 2003), and it remains a primary focus in the OECD educational/economic agenda, holding it to a utilitarian standard concerned with evaluation, accountability and the facilitation of cross-national governance in order to achieve ‘best practice’ (Ydesen, 2019, s. 4). In this way, the knowledge economy must be understood as an expression of production, where students may almost be considered workers. Indeed, in a perversely top-down view of the educational sector, using a utilitarian philosophical lens, the education sector is nothing more than an assembly line designed to produce intelligent workers, with education being just a bridge for business. Perhaps this is exactly why this green paper is not as central as other papers in the selection. NOU 2019: 23 New Education Act appears grounded in an apparent economic perspective, having dedicated an entire section to changes in the developing labour market (NOU 2019: 23, p. 23). Here, the paper also cites OECD’s opinion that we are on the cusp of technological breakthroughs which will change the labour market further still (NOU 2019: 23, p. 157). This is concurrent in the green paper, which cites OECD references leading up to a recommendation for a change. The labour market is changing, OECD argues the knowledge base of the education sector is thin, OECD presents a recommendation for remediation. While these papers are products of expert advice and commissions, they simultaneously rely heavily on OECD recommendations as a legitimizing source of evidence.

Indeed, the influence of the OECD can be found throughout green papers, and while it may only be in references to its literature or to communication with its experts, its knowledge and agenda are still a natural part of the advice and recommendations given.

The system in which we create and share knowledge in Norway through green papers and white papers is, as we argued earlier, not entirely free from influence, especially when economic ideology and agenda are gaining traction in the educational sector. Similar language can regularly be found in communication both inside the OECD and between the organisation and the Ministry of Education in Norway as well. Investing in human capital, as found in a letter to then sitting Minister of Education Kristin Halvorsen from then sitting Secretary-General Angel Gurría. In this letter, increasing the competency of teachers also becomes part of the agenda (Table 1.1).

The 2015–2020 episode in the Norwegian context was heavily centred around the future of the Norwegian education system. Whether this is endemic in the global educational policy

agenda is not entirely certain, but communication and recommendations from the OECD also aligned with similar issues, especially the labour market of the future. The OECD's alignment with business and the labour markets is apparent, and thus its recommendations may share similar values. The OECD review of Norway's innovation policy from 2015 aims in this direction, questioning industry–science relationships, innovation, and economic performance, governance, and future policy-making as central issues to be investigated and addressed. The future appears to be viewed through a lens of economic growth, and the future labour market for the students. Like the OECD and the Norwegian green papers argue, the labour markets are changing rapidly as technology and innovation develop, ushering in a new age of schooling and education. The system, as it used to be, may no longer suffice, as industry is becoming increasingly automated. What used to be a labour market in which a student could get away with having quit after upper secondary education and still have possibilities in industry is becoming increasingly rare, and the necessity of specialized competencies is increasing.

5.1 What and whose evidence matters?

During the process of producing a 'white paper on the Quality of Lower Secondary Education in Norway', the OECD holds a discussion with key Norwegian stakeholders, presenting their recommendations and the conclusions of their review. While this may seem insignificant at first, remember that the process of producing a white paper in Norway is institutionalized. This means that what used to be considered a process which should be free from political agenda and only concerned with producing new knowledge is influenced by interest groups, organisations, and politicians. Direct interaction between the OECD and experts is striking, seeing as it very clearly indicates how thick-stranded the cooperation and communication between the Ministry of Education and the OECD is in terms of communication (i.e. emails, meetings, discussions, formal, informal, and everything in between). Without insight, it is easy to misinterpret the OECD as an entity far above governments, but the organisation is easier understood as a tight cooperating and actively communicating forum.

Now, as I have argued earlier, to understand policy transfer is to understand how a structure works. When we have discussed how the Ministry of Education uses green papers to inform the creation of white papers, it is important to understand that references matter. References are used as legitimizing evidence, and a natural extension of this idea is asking the question:

whose evidence matters? Part of the reason for doing this bibliometric analysis is that in attempting to understand how policy transfers among a national state authority and through international networks, one must first understand how policy, knowledge, and ideology move in the political space, and the use of references may be a way to express this. Do the actors use more of X knowledge compared to Y knowledge? Green and white papers oftentimes attempt to fill a role: a tool for remediating domestic problems using knowledge gathered by experts.

I would argue that this is the core incentivising mechanism of policy transfer: the use of expert networks to remediate complex policy problems. The OECD is especially interesting for this exact reason, being perhaps the largest global forum being able to deliver expert advice, relevant precise data, and direct, targeted policy recommendations. Back to my ‘problem’, if a domestic context was to solve an emerging problem, evidence-based governing dictates that decision-makers pursue the most precise data and how to solve this emerging problem. Solving this problem without the use of previous data gathered from experts abroad would be unwise. Therefore, we would ask for help from the most competency-rich actors. This is the general idea of best-practice solutions.

An interesting perspective can be found in Baek (2022), where his innovative research perspective divides the use of international knowledge into three categories: 1. Frequency, 2. Function, and 3. Level of engagement. In the examination of three different contexts, the US, Korea, and Norway, he found that the Norwegian context often references international knowledge, using the knowledge to innovate, and that its interaction with external bodies of expertise such as the OECD shows a high level of engagement. What this means *in praxis* is that the Norwegian context utilizes international knowledge and expertise to a high degree. Echoing Baek (2022), I argue that the Norwegian context’s perceived needs fit well with what knowledge and expertise the OECD are brokering—not only because of the context’s interest in innovation, which I would argue is because of an alignment with the ideology of the knowledge economy, but also because of the OECD knowledge’s easily referenceable nature. This will be further discussed later in this chapter, but for now I posit that the use of references in Norway is contingent on three factors: *empirically striking data* (in the form of statistical data), *easily translated information* (from experts to decision-makers) and *problem solving* (as in the case of best-practice solutions).

5.1.1 Best Practice

Best-practice policy solutions appear to be widely popular literature that the OECD is brokering. It gathers evidence in the form of data from different nations' policies, arguing their use in another national context. The context may differ, oftentimes only being recommended based on a sense of propinquity geographically, culturally, and institutionally, but what our data also show is that much evidence is gathered from networks. There are multiple different networks employing diverse types of communication. This thesis has been able to gather documentations on the Global Science Forum (GSF), which primarily is interested in tertiary education and researchers internationally, but some documents provide reports on lower education as well. The GSF agenda is centred around research and researchers, higher education institutions, and the movement of knowledge across borders. The GSF meeting from 19 October 2017 stressed the harmonisation of international research and the importance of international and interdisciplinary collaboration to address societal challenges. During this meeting, different delegates shared experiences with the forum, such as Poland sharing a newly established government agency for academic exchange, and Portugal sharing new plans for open science and developing a national research information system, having started the INCoDe2030 initiative. Naturally, as argued, what Portugal and Poland are doing is not necessarily relevant to the Norwegian context, but the Norwegian interest in best-practice policy advice makes it more relevant. If Poland found a brilliant way to increase test scores across the board, the Norwegian government would find this interesting, but perhaps the two systems are too dissimilar for shared advice to be learned. In the context of educational systems, it is a common belief that policy transfer works best when the systems are similar in terms of the challenges they are facing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013, pp. 20-21), meaning that the Norwegian and Polish educational systems would have to be relatively institutionally similar for the advice to be received and learned.

OECD reviews are often done with best practice in mind: the organisation will review a field or aspect of a sector, in this case tertiary education, and recommend policy advice to remediate problem areas, similarly to how the NOU 2015: 2 refers to OECD governing complex education systems, or GCES (NOU, 2014: 2, s. 360) and how findings from, for example, research done in Ontario, Canada shapes OECD recommendations for the Norwegian context in spite of Canada being part of the Anglosphere and Norway being part of the Nordics. Perhaps this is evidence of what Legrand (2021) refers to as transnational propinquity, with geography and cultural propinquity not having as much influence as

previously thought, and that good policy advice is simply good policy advice, so long as there are some shared values present. Since taking recommendations is contingent upon propinquity, one should also factor in agenda as a contingency as well, as in the case of transgovernmental propinquity, where shared values and agendas play a large role in tandem with geography, culture, and economic commensurability. If the general status quo in educational policy is the ‘futurization’ of educational systems and pedagogy, advice towards this agenda is evaluated more positively. Large forums such as the GSF, CSTP, and GCES all share the trait of not providing specialized policy advice—functioning as open forums to share experiences. The advice is therefore rarely directed at a specific nation, but the networks build knowledge through shared information and dissemination that every member may bring back to its own government, oftentimes in the form of reports. Interestingly, reports from the Norwegian delegates have stressed the importance of coming with a ‘clear agenda’ so that they may ‘gain more’ from these meetings (CSTP, 2012).

Legrand (2021, p. 201) found similar evidence where some delegates and member countries, especially within the Anglosphere, may use their collective influence on shaping OECD agendas to fit their own intergovernmental agendas more closely. This is more commonly known as agenda-setting. The Norwegians and perhaps the Nordics also do the same, pushing for the prioritization of work, which furthers our understanding of potential effects from research and research policy on economic growth and the research system. Legrand’s (2021) example is exerted by the network known as the Belmont Conference, a policy network framed around labour policy (Legrand, 2021, pp. 194, 197).

5.1.2 Propinquity, or just best practice?

Legrand (2021) makes an argument for this using the Covid-19 pandemic as a contemporary example of how best-practice solutions were used to move policy across borders. Taking kids out of the classroom and moving them to Zoom, the closing of (literal) borders, the closing of shops, shopping centres, restaurants, bars, and gyms, the adoption of the compulsory use of masks on public transport, and the use of a one-meter rule when inside—naturally, this learned advice is not necessarily from policy, but it exemplifies how a domestic problem can be remediated using expert advice across borders.

Politically, during this crisis, the Norwegian government would oftentimes use propinquity, or likeness, as an argument for whether the country should open or remain closed, citing how the Danish, Swedish, or Finnish governments remained closed or not, and how they are similar in properties such as size, inhabitants, and climates. Legrand (2021) argues that propinquity or value-driven preference drives cross-border policy engagement. Prevailing institutional or national likeness induces officials to gravitate to or privilege lessons emanating from the familiarity of like-minded states (Legrand, 2021, p. 79). An important distinction that Legrand (2021) makes here is that propinquity may also be called a ‘value-driven’ preference, with political, economic, and cultural values thus being a major mechanism in the process of policy transfer. This begs the question of why the Norwegian government, being as interested in an education ‘into oneself’ to the point of having it as a central part of its education act, is valuing advice in rising degree from an organisation primarily interested in economic expansion.

While propinquity and value-driven preference are most commonly understood as traits that concern nations, Legrand (2021, pp. 113-114) argues we are moving towards transgovernmental propinquity as well. Shared problems beyond economic or geographical borders require cooperation, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or global warming. In the case of education, one might consider higher education completion rates as a transnational problem, the argument being that men less often than women go on to tertiary education (OECD, 2021). Take note of the OECD literature in use here. If I search for data on education statistics using Google as a search engine, I may find myself reading OECD statistics in the majority of the documents and literature on the first page.

I have mentioned earlier that green papers are a defining part of Norwegian policy development. The generation of knowledge is not free from political influence or agenda, perhaps in many ways being a product of such influence. A government may enact a commission which creates these green papers, and the recommendations in these papers must be based on evidence. These green papers provide the knowledge used to create the white papers which in turn create policy. The increasing use of OECD literature may therefore be construed as strides toward an economically aligned education system that is primarily interested in economic growth. In a way, this increasingly thick-stranded cooperation is creating a structure which facilitates the transfer of policy, but as a product of the same structure, we are reshaping the goals of Norwegian education. While some of the green papers which reference the OECD a lot (like NOU: 2019: 3 *Future Competencies II*, which references the OECD 20 times) are not necessarily very important in the context of centrality, it remains important to note that these are the green papers which matter for the future of Norwegian education. What are the students supposed to learn? Where should their values lie? What are the goals of the Norwegian education system?

As a point, one should remain interested in where knowledge comes from in the production of policy. Receiving policy advice and the transfer of policy across borders may contain other contexts policies' ideological background and values. The Anglosphere nations share policy advice with each other, and even transfer it directly, perhaps *because* they share the same economic agenda and ideology. This example is from the Belmont Conference, which is primarily interested in labour policy, and where the meeting oftentimes will discuss unemployment, the labour market, and economic policy.

In the education context, Norwegian green papers will reference Global Progress reports and Policy Reviews more often than International Large-scale Assessments. As we can derive from our findings, as the importance of a document increases, so does the referencing to OECD policy reviews as legitimizing evidence and argument. From this we can argue that the OECD is gaining prevalence in Norwegian policy development, and that OECD's agenda being primarily interested in economic growth across OECD-member countries is gaining traction in the Norwegian education system as well. What is interesting about this finding is that not all OECD literature and evidence are created equal; the green papers are primarily interested in best-practice policy advice, which is often derived from clear-cut evidence and data. The idea of best practice, which is often grounded in statistical evidence, is easy to use

as an argument. This is perhaps best described at another time, but one hypothesis is that as far as evidence is concerned, statistics has strong empirical legitimacy. Volmari et al. (2022), for example, found that when experts attempt to explain the lack of use of Nordic references in Finnish policy documents, they identify a narrative that ‘Nordic cooperation is not well documented and does not produce data that lends itself easily to reference’ (Volmari et al., 2022, p. 368). The use of best practices appear especially evident in green papers thematically focused on the future of schooling and the labour market. The prospect of a labour force which is competent, educated, and valuable is clearly enticing, but there is a clear shift in goals and agendas in the Norwegian education sector. The 2015–2020 episode we discussed earlier seems to be aligned toward the changing labour market, perhaps because of reform designed to remediate the concern that our students are falling behind. From the GSF and NESLI meetings, the Norwegian delegates are interested in the open use of OECD data and are pushing for the increased use of OECD literature and especially in making the literature public or more readily available. This seems only natural, as the same report also argues for the increased use of OECD policy advice, claiming that their literature and data are underutilized by experts.

5.1.3 The importance of convenience

This thesis’ evidence is grounded in numeric presentations of policy patterns. The numbers used to present data and findings only serve to add some empirical weight to a question of what may be, primarily, a social mechanism. The data on centrality serve to add a measurement of prominence of the OECD in the Norwegian context, and this importance appears to be rising. We can make this argument by referring to the analysis, which shows that not only are Norwegian policy actors referencing the OECD more often in Norwegian green texts, but they are also referencing OECD literature in documents of relatively high importance or prominence (See Table 3.3). These references vary, but as centrality increases, global progress reports and policy reviews are referenced the most, as opposed to international large-scale assessments, which are referenced less.

This asymmetric increase may be because global progress reports and policy reviews are easier for experts to use. International large-scale assessment, I would argue, only serves to present how we are doing comparatively; it does not present solutions which decisions makers may use or consider. Steiner-Khamsi et al. (2020) found that best-practice solutions

are the most referenced when considering the translation from expert knowledge to decision-makers, which may very well be because they are more easily translatable to decision-makers who are primarily interested in ‘solution-producing’ literature and knowledge. Global progress reports and policy reviews offer this; they provide knowledge of ‘what works elsewhere’ and ‘what works/does not work’ in our own or propinquate context. This is one of the core mechanisms Legrand (2021) maintains: instrumental actors are seeking to derive suitable policy solutions from the number of case examples available to them (Legrand, 2021, p. 49). Policy transfer is contingent upon propinquity, context, and relevance, and while propinquity may sometimes be clear, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Norwegian government’s agreement with or disregard of Nordic measures, the likeness of context and relevance are as readily apparent. The political environment (e.g. what type of government is in power—whether they liberal, conservative, generally interested in experts, or not interested in expert opinion), the people’s opinion (again, the case of the Covid-19 pandemic is interesting, seeing as mask-mandates and lockdowns were generally very polarizing), and available economic resources may all play a part as either facilitating or adverse mechanisms. Using global progress reports and policy reviews may provide what experts are mandated to research—what works and why it works, and how it may translate well to the context in question, serving as a bridge between experts and decision-makers.

Whose evidence matters is not entirely clear. It does become clearer, however, as my analysis found in what *type* of OECD documents are being increasingly used and what *types* of documents are being used less. I argue that a defining property of the OECD references used is in general to fill a role of legitimizing evidence or as best-practice solutions, but not all best-practice solutions are designed the same way. Global progress reports and policy reviews are referenced more often than international large-scale assessment, contrary to what, for example, Steiner-Khamsi (2012) would perhaps have assumed (See Table 3.4). Volmari et al. also describes a similar narrative in the Finnish context, where the Nordic cooperation is unable to produce as useful data as their context requires for referencing—to the surprise of Finnish experts (Volmari et al., 2022, p. 368).

Arguing for an increased importance of OECD policy advice across all typologies is in any case relatively clear. Referring to our data on centrality, both in-degree centrality and out-degree centrality, there appears to be a steady increase of references across all types. What we can derive from this is that, yes, OECD reports and literature become increasingly utilized as importance increases. One could naturally argue that this is because documents which are important tend to reference other works more, but even as referencing increases in general, the utilization of OECD information increases the most in in-degree central documents and at a faster rate. One can argue why this is, and I posit that the evidence that matters must (at least) appear *empirically striking*, which is preferably grounded in statistical evidence; have an inherent *ease of translation*, as in the case of global progress reports; and be directly *problem solving*, as in the case of policy reviews. Global progress reports and policy reviews are increasing at a more rapid rate than international large-scale assessment possibly because ILSAs lack the necessary problem-solving and translative properties that policy reviews and global progress reports contain. Global progress reports and policy reviews appear easier to use. Verger (2022) seconds this, arguing that policy-makers tend to resort to research sources where they can obtain straight-forward answers to frequently complex policy problems (Verger, 2022b, p. 399).

5.2 The social characteristic of the transfer process

Networks such as GSF and NESLI serve to further increase the legitimacy of OECD literature in green paper development; it is hard to imagine that these meetings do not foster relationships. Like Legrand (2021) found from his interviews, the Belmont Conference came out of informal relationships formed in the OECD. Like the interviewee argued:

'... When I go to Paris I will very likely have lunch or dinner – very informally – with Australia, New Zealand, whoever is around, very often the UK and the US. And we are going to have lunch or dinner and we are going to talk about all sorts of things, and we are going to start exchanging ideas' (Legrand, 2021, pp. 199-200).

It does not come across entirely illogical that the continued participation in OECD meetings, workshops, and policy review groups will influence the process of producing green papers and by extension the production of policy, leading to increased use of OECD literature,

participation in OECD meetings, and ultimately an alignment with OECD economic growth agenda.

Perhaps interaction and collaboration may help us understand this; Legrand (2021) claims that transgovernmental networks are not *ad hoc*, transient linkages, but rather networks of functionally equivalent regulators that are purposively established loosely-structured, peer-to-peer ties developed through frequent interaction. Interaction, in this sense, provides the conditions for policy learning. As Dunlop and Radelli (2013) argue, learning is an unintended product of dense systems of interaction between policy actors. Slaughter (2004) argues that the coming together of national regulators, on their own volition, that are regularizing their interactions as network or a networked organization raises the spectre of agencies on the loose (Slaughter, 2004; Volmari et al., 2022). I argue that collaboration between transnational and domestic policy officials, experts, and decision-makers is contingent upon interaction, which in turn is contingent upon collaboration mediated through networks. The networks provide both the necessary conditions for interaction and collaboration, which themselves provide the necessary conditions for the facilitation of networks. Communication is also understood as interaction, meaning that interaction encompasses both formal and informal communication—formal as in mediated by networks with clear agendas and shared ideas of what the network’s mandates are, or informal as in mediated through informal communication through emails and informal meetings such as lunches, dinners, or drinks with colleagues.

These networks, this communication, and these relationships are what create structures that facilitate policy transfer over time. I would even argue that networks, geography, and culture alone are not enough to facilitate knowledge transfer, as it may be contingent on a sense of informal relationship as well. Knowing your ‘colleagues’, as it were, may be an important part of the mechanism. Perhaps professional kinship, in a bureaucratic perspective, is required. Experts communicate across borders in a large epistemic collegiate, and attending networks such as GSF and NESLI fosters relationships like these; seeing as how meetings like the GSF occur twice a year, opportunities for these relationships to be shaped are plentiful.

This leaves us with another dimension, one of relation both formal and informal, with the former being understood as a ‘workplace’ relationship where professionalism is key, and

meetings with networks is the key socializing arena, and informal as the one Legrand (2021) argues for (i.e. meeting for dinner or lunch and using informal and friendly language in emails). Fostering relationships across borders may be just as important as geographical, historical, and cultural propinquity. This only adds to the lucidity of policy transfer networks and the process of policy transfer; it would be easier if there were only a structural dimension to account for, but seeing as these structures are facilitated and created by agents, agency becomes a natural extension of the discussion. Like we found during our dive into the work of Bhaskar (1944–2014) on critical realism, we would be remiss if the thesis only examined these networks and this process through the lens of pure structuralism. In a purely structuralist view, the structure the communication has created would be the deciding factor in whether transfer occurs. Rather, we need to understand these processes and this emergent thick-stranded network of cooperation as a dual mechanism of both structure and agency, where the structures create the necessary conditions for agents to, in turn, create the structures which create the conditions necessary for policy transfer, international epistemic knowledge transfer, and professional cooperation.

What this means for our thesis is that policy transfer is at its core a social phenomenon, exposed through generative mechanisms through structure at the social level. Critically, this means that the duality of the agents creating a structure creates the necessary conditions for the phenomenon to take place. The transfer of policy is the transfer of knowledge, and mediating this process is communication through agents in networks of epistemic expertise. It is difficult to predict exactly ‘what’ policy is being transferred, and by extension, what knowledge is valued more intently than other. Reality is complex, which makes the notion of creating a ‘predictive’ social science difficult, but not impossible (Danermark & Ekström, 2019). The argument for best practice maintained by Steiner-Khamsi (2020) is one such attempt. Perhaps controversially, I would argue that social science is content with not being predictive; its task is to search for causal mechanisms of the events we study, to shed some light on complex human interaction in systems that are inherently difficult to ascertain causal effects from.

Policy transfer networks or epistemic communities facilitate policy transfer in a similar manner; they provide a forum for cooperation and communication which may in turn give the experts, the delegates of networks, the necessary background information to recommend solutions in green papers. Importantly, epistemic communities are not necessarily mandated

to produce policy recommendations, but it does not seem far-fetched that this is a part of discussions. Knowing exactly *why* a Polish delegate argues strongly for a specific policy for remediating weak PISA-results, for example, and having the forum to ask questions and discussing its applicability to another context may be invaluable. The Polish example is important, as this is exactly what the opening talk of NESLI 2014 discussed. The meeting's report uses the term 'The Network' explicitly, summarizing what it has shown interest in and what they are discussing. This example presents Ms. Magdalena Gorowska-Fells' (p. 51) presentation on the Polish education system, as well as the network's expressed interest in the means that parents use to prepare their children to succeed in national examinations. They also expressed interest in the Polish system's lowering of the starting age of compulsory education and parents' concerns on the reform. This coincides well with our hypothesis, that the networks contribute an open forum for discussion and valuable feedback from peers, and that these discussions and feedback give experts necessary and valuable information on recommendations for remediating their own domestic problems. The example continues with Mr. Michael Sitek's (p. 51) presentation on the changes in the Polish education system and its improvements in education performance, with the network expressing interest in the research perspective and the use of international comparative data to address the challenges met by the Polish education system.

Comparative data is relatively self-explanatory: it is data on countries in comparison to each other (e.g. how well we perform in comparison to the Polish education system on PISA or TIMSS tests, or how we compare on the completion on tertiary education). Here, the network argue that the Polish education system has used comparative data to remediate challenges in an open forum. While only being one example, the general purpose of these meetings and discussions appears to be the sharing and discussion of remediating policy, or at the least complicated 'how we fixed a problem'.

Networks such as the GSF or NESLI are arranged by the OECD for the benefit of all who participate, but I would argue that without the express wish of the participants, these networks would never exist in the first place. The agents in the policy-and-knowledge transfer process are creators of the structures which allow these networks to exist *imprimis*. I have argued that policy transfer is facilitated by and facilitates policy transfer networks, but this process is contingent upon structures that facilitate agential interaction. Formal interaction, as in the case of country reviews, and informal interaction, as in the case of lunch,

dinners, and drinks, create the necessary circumstances for informal relationships to develop, which in turn construct network structures between actors and may very well be a large factor at play in the policy-and-knowledge transfer process. I argue that formal and informal relationships conditioned by policy transfer networks facilitate policy transfer by creating an environment where receiving experiences, advice, and knowledge is highly valued. It remains to be determined whether these formal and informal relationships between actors influence decision-makers and experts in the policy development process, especially in the Norwegian context. I would endeavour to answer this in a future analysis, perhaps by employing a similar strategy as Legrand (2021), by interviewing experts and decision-makers in an attempt to map out a network of agents, creating a vast map of relations.

This perspective of the policy transfer process remains underdeveloped, understudied, and, frankly, thin. While both Legrand (2021) and Evans and Davies (1999) aspired to a Giddensian (1984) perspective on the policy transfer process, it remains weighted towards structuralism, oftentimes persisting to explain processes as both a consequence of and accelerated by structures. Legrand (2021) remediates this by employing interviews as an explanatory factor of policy transfer networks, simultaneously holding the notion of the Belmont conference (read: network) generated by the structure the OECD created for it. In my own perspective, I would argue that the Belmont conference (read: network) created the necessary conditions under its own volition, making the very structure facilitating a network that operates on multiple levels of policy development—domestically, internationally, and transnationally. As a closing argument, the thick-stranded network actors in the policy transfer process appear to have a far larger role to play than previously discussed, providing a new, interesting, and important perspective to study further.

6 In conclusion

Policy transfer appears to be a phenomenon born of social interaction, with the express purpose of serving as remediating action for decision-makers. The social and agential nature of this process is contingent upon necessary structures which must be in place. It appears that these structures are the product of and are facilitated by agents in networks through thick-stranded communication, cooperation, and formal and informal relationships. The informality of these relationships may provide the necessary conditions for formal relationships to appear, as in the case of the Belmont Conference, and vice versa, formal relationships may in turn create the necessary conditions for the propagation of informal relationships, like we can see in emails between agents in the Royal Ministry of Education and the OECD. These informal relationships, fostered through meetings in networks such as the GSF, NESLI, or Belmont, as Legrand (2021) found, may drive policy transfer in a way that remains unexplored, especially in the case of informal relationships and ‘knowing’ the people you are discussing policy with on a personal level. An important note is that the Belmont conference was founded exactly *because* of the informal relationships between its members.

The use of OECD references in policy-making in the Norwegian context is increasing, and formal and informal relationships developed through cooperation and communication through networks and epistemic communities may drive policy transfer processes in ways we never could have anticipated in the early nineties. Technology plays a large factor in this in two ways—one being emergent technologies, such as the internet, granting access to open libraries of comparative data from transnational organisations like the OECD and instant communication through emails and similar mediums. Secondly, as discussed earlier, technological innovations and a steadily innovating labour market drives the education sector to evaluate itself and discuss whether it is keeping up with other nations academically, meaning that comparative data and best-practice solutions become steadily more relevant for experts and decision-makers alike. Citing OECD reports and literature becomes relevant in this context, seeing as the organisation is the largest broker of comparative data ‘on the market of knowledge’, giving it normative agenda-setting power. From the perspective of decision-makers and experts alike, the OECD ‘knows’ what works, and using OECD literature may legitimize expert recommendations in green papers.

Not all OECD literature is equal; for experts the use of references appears contingent upon their effective value—a combination of translative properties and its problem-solving characteristic. Furthering this, I argue that in the process of producing a green paper, experts may pick and choose OECD literature and data which fit these categories to satisfy the needs of decision-makers producing white papers. Experts and organizations may draw upon general and transnational propinquity and likeness to make their arguments, as in the case of the Anglosphere. I posit that experts and organizations participating in the policy transfer process *between* (in the case of regional and international cooperation) and *with* the Nordics (as in the case of transnational GSF and NESLI-meetings) will find themselves valuing advice used in other Nordic countries doing well according to OECD standards, such as Finland. This stems from similarities of geography and culture, as in the case of traditional propinquity and institutional similarities. Legrand (2021) argues for the clear importance of common institutional characteristics and features, referencing a Westminster style of governing as found in the UK and Australia.

My interest in what the future holds appears borrowed, and I argue that there are multiple reasons for this. For one, we are in a sense ‘competing’. The OECD economic agenda shifts other (social, educational) agendas towards an apparent overarching idea of economic prosperity for their members. In essence, this means that the OECD economic agenda influences both the OECD and its members’ educational agenda towards an overarching goal and idea centred on economic prosperity. In turn, I argue that their economic alignment reduces their economic agenda towards future prosperity and economic increase—the fostering of the knowledge economy. Second, policy advice given from the OECD or gathered by experts may therefore be aligned with this ideological attitude, in part because the referencing of OECD literature and data furthers this, and because of formal communication between the OECD and Norway gives concrete evidence (see Figure 3.1) of agenda setting. PISA and other ILSAs can, in my argument, be regarded as scoreboards, global policy reports as insight into possible strategies, and policy reviews as direct policy advice. Thirdly, the Norwegian context creates the necessary conditions for this transfer to happen. For one, the Norwegian governing complex is interested in evidence, as I argued in the section on evidence-based governing. Also, the 2015–2020 period produced reforms centred on the connection between education and the labour markets which in turn made OECD literature intrinsically valuable. The OECD literature was, in this context, the best advice available for the problem at hand. It is hard to say what the future holds, but should

the Norwegian education system remain as keenly interested in the labour markets, I hypothesize that the use of OECD literature in important green papers (read: documents scoring high on in-degree measurements) will continue to increase, or at the very least remain steady. I argue that the global and local contexts as they are now are creating the necessary conditions for the continued use of OECD literature, reports, and data.

Legrand's (2021) argument of propinquity asserts how likeness is a necessary factor in the policy transfer process, and propinquity may be a deciding factor in whether policy is transferred. Indeed, propinquity, transfer networks, epistemic communities, and the informal and formal relationships generated by both networks and communities all matter when attempting to understand the complex mechanism of policy transfer, but this thesis contends that thick-stranded relational networks created by communication, interaction, and social relationships may be a major, underdeveloped perspective in need of more research. These networks, consisting of experts, interest organizations, and decision-makers appear, to underlie the entire process of policy transfer, driving interaction and knowledge and ideas sharing between agents by providing the necessary structure for such interaction to take place. There was a hope in this thesis that there would be some evidence suggesting that some of these meetings (the GSF, CSTP, GCES) would share direct policy advice; rather, a different type of evidence became clear from the delegates' rich reports on how the meetings work, and what they hope to 'gain' from these meetings. What I have found is that the cooperation between the OECD and Norway is thick stranded—connected through formal, informal, and invisible connections. The invisible connection, as far as this thesis is concerned, is a connection of values, agenda, and general likeness. The OECD economic agenda and its use of best-practice policy advice are what comes across as most valuable in the green and white papers we have selected for analysis. It may therefore be valuable to understand how this relationship works, seeing as how we are interestingly using OECD literature, data, and information in our important green and white papers at an increasing rate.

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